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Good Practices for Reconciling

Work and Family Life

Guide for Companies

**Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity
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Guide for Companies

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	5
2. TARGET GROUPS.....	8
3. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR RECONCILING WORK AND FAMILY LIFE	10
3.1. Creating childcare services	10
3.2. Creating care services for the elderly	13
3.3. Parental leave for working fathers and mothers	14
3.4. Incentives for fathers to participate more in family life .	20
3.5. Flexible work organisation	22
4. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES PRACTICES	27
5. OTHER PRACTICAL CASES	32
6. SOCIAL AUDITS: LEADING INDICATORS OF GOOD PRACTICES	34
7. ADVANTAGES FOR COMPANIES	38
8. EUROPEAN DIRECTIVES	39
9. CONCLUSION	43
10. BIBLIOGRAPHY	44

4 **Good Practices for Reconciling** Work and Family Life

1. Introduction

Since the second half of the twentieth century industrialised societies have been experiencing substantial changes. In Portugal these changes have been particularly felt in the last thirty years and have had major repercussions on the socio-professional structure of the country's population, particularly in terms of the growing feminisation of the working population and the ways in which family life is organised¹.

Over this period the proportion of women on the labour market has risen significantly. In 2000 it reached 60% – a target set out by the Lisbon Strategy for 2010. Another significant figure is the proportion of couples with children where both parents work full-time (67%) and the number of part-time positions – especially those occupied by women –, which is among the lowest anywhere in Europe. These are surprising figures, especially if we consider the great shortage of family support infrastructures, such as childcare services – particularly crèches for children under the age of two – support services for dependent senior citizens, and the so-called proximity services.

Furthermore, whereas in some of the more advanced European countries a high female employment rate has gone hand-in-hand with a progressive re-balancing of the status and roles allocated to men and women within the family group, despite some progress, traditional

¹ Maria Josefina Leitão and Joana Correia dos Santos worked with the authors on the update for this edition.

attitudes and behaviours about family support persist in Portuguese society: in the majority of families the work of caring for children, the elderly and the sick is essentially done by women.

Simultaneously we are witnessing a significant rise in life expectancy, with the ensuing increase in the number of dependents senior citizens in need of care, as well as a major fall in birth rates, which is reflected in the diminishing role played by family networks and reliance on help from family members.

Another major emerging social change in Portuguese society is the fact that the younger generations are spending longer in education, and that female students in particular are attaining higher educational levels than they used to, all of which is also impacting the work and family lives of both men and women.

New family types – especially those derived from divorce and births outside marriage – are characteristic traits of modern societies that are also appearing in Portugal and are making it more difficult to ensure the balance between two of the most important areas of social life: work and family life.

In the economic sphere, businesses are facing new competitive challenges that demand greater competitiveness, not only on the technological level, but also increasingly in terms of organisational efficiency and qualified human resources who possess a wide range of skills – something that is much easier to achieve with gender-balanced teams.

There is thus a pressing need to rethink the ways in which work is organised, so as to enable **workers of both sexes to reconcile their family and work responsibilities**. This is a very topical issue, which has been widely discussed, is addressed in the Portuguese Constitution², and forms part of strategies that seek to promote equal employment opportunities for women and men, included in Portugal's National Plans for Employment since 1998.

The current trend at EU level is to discuss and encourage the implementation of corporate policies to reconcile work and family life. Particularly since the Lisbon Summit in 2000, the EU has been drawing attention to corporate social responsibility as part of its economic and social reforms.

The European Union recommends that company results be analysed on the basis of two criteria: the company's profit margins and the quality of life it provides to its staff, both at and away from the workplace.

At the moment various European forums are discussing the possibility that in the near future quality certification processes should also include social audits to evaluate companies on issues such as reconciliation of work and family.

This Good Practice Guide for Reconciling Work and Family Life lists a range of principles and practices that promote gender balance by allowing women to allocate more time to their careers and men to

² Constitutional Law no. 1/97 of 20th September 1997 (Fourth Revision of the Constitution).

devote more time to family life. It also lists ways of optimising human resources, thereby making a significant contribution to greater productivity and business innovation.

This guide therefore presents a variety of solutions for reconciling work and family life and provides suggestions and examples of what can be done and, indeed, has already been done in this field in different countries, including Portugal. The final part provides a set of indicators that enable companies to assess their human resource policies and the ways in which they are organised and to follow new principles with a view to becoming more innovative at the social level and promoting equal employment opportunities.

2. Target Groups

The primary objective of the set of principles, suggestions and good practices presented in the following pages is to raise awareness among employers. They are the ones who must reassess and adapt their work organisation, in the light of the social changes currently taking place at the socio-professional and family spheres.

Flexible working hours and forms of work, services that support family life, parental leave and other support measures for working parents are aspects of the issue that must be considered by companies when planning for the future. These measures seek to ensure the well-being and job satisfaction of human resources, to improve the quality of the

end product or service they provide, and to create the conditions needed for companies to be able to attract the best human capital. They also help to reduce absenteeism, improve companies' image, making these companies leading examples of corporate social responsibility and citizenship, for which the best professionals want to work.

Achieving the corporate citizenship that the developed countries are looking to promote at this turn of the millennium involves addressing the human capital element, particularly in the field of gender diversity and complementarity, but also recognising the personal needs and family responsibilities of both female and male workers.

Albeit less directly, this Good Practice Guide for Reconciling Work and Family Life is also aimed at the social partners and at workers, be they male or female. It provides them with information on measures and forms of work organisation that provide solutions to their problems when it comes to reconciling work and family life. This is a way of raising their awareness about issues that can be subject to negotiation with a view to adapting work conditions to the daily needs of modern day society.

3. General principles for reconciling work and family life

Although by no means an exhaustive list, the measures presented below are primarily intended to help reconcile work and family life:

1. Creating childcare services
2. Creating care services for the elderly
3. Parental leave for working fathers and mothers
4. Incentives for fathers to participate more in family life
5. Flexible work organisation

3.1. *Creating childcare services*

We frequently hear it said that concentration and productivity increase when staff feel relaxed and peace of mind knowing that their children are in a safe and quality environment while they are at work. With a view to meeting the needs and concerns of working parents, some companies take steps to provide childcare services, and in doing so make an exemplary contribution to reconciling work and family life.

Aware of their staff's concerns in this respect, they choose to create their own facilities and services, sometimes sharing the infrastructure costs with other nearby companies in the same or different sectors of business.

Others opt for one-off activities and organise holiday or after-school programmes for children, transport services, sporting activities, parties or other measures that seek to relieve the problems facing working parents.

Examples of good practices:

In Portugal

Bruno Janz, a company which makes water and electricity meters, formed an association of which both the company and its staff are members. The association has a crèche, a kindergarten and a primary school. To start with they only took staff members' children, but then they opened their doors to others as well. They organise cultural and sporting activities and seek to give the children a quality education.

The airline TAP has a nursery school for its staff's children. The company currently also has a 24-hour-a-day crèche and kindergarten, so as to enable both its flight crews and its ground personnel on shift work to leave their children at the centre when they are working at night.

Portuguese Railways (CP) also has a nursery school for its employees' children. In addition the company also offers them holiday programmes at holiday camps around the country.

At Grafe, an advertising company, parents can bring small children into the company when they need to solve a crisis at short notice. The layout of the company's offices is designed to facilitate this possibility. There are also cases of couples who both work for the company and share looking after their children at the office while they are waiting for them to get a place at a nursery school.

The bank Caixa Económica Montepio Geral gives its staff childcare grants to support their family and school needs. Montepio Geral's

own social services include a whole variety of programmes for employees' children – especially holiday camps and arrangements with babysitting companies.

The in-house regulations of the association for the support of social and community integration, Espaço T, expressly state that employees' children are allowed to be at the workplace during working hours when necessary for health reasons or because of their parents' schedules, on condition that their presence does not disturb others.

The Loures Municipal Water and Sanitation Service (SMASCML) tries to adapt its shifts to the needs of staff with small children. For example, where both parents work as road sweepers, their schedules are determined in such a way that one of them can always stay at home to look after the children.

Elsewhere

The Danish Post Office, which employs 35,000 people scattered around the country, developed a joint childcare project with the Danish Railways. The objective was to adapt crèche opening and closing times to parents' working hours, inasmuch as 70% of the company's staff start and finish work outside the normal hours of the public childcare services. This led to extended operating times for crèches in ten cities, with two nursery schools that are open 24 hours a day.

In France Saint-Camille Hospital, which has 700 staff, created a local association called EVT (Balance Life Work) in order to provide hospital workers with a variety of services, particularly ironing, sewing, meals and other domestic services, such as helping to find reliable and trustworthy home help, for example.

Möhringer Maschinenbau, a German company that specialises in the production of wood-working machinery, has introduced a work schedule that it calls a "life-long" system. The system

enables staff to accumulate working hours throughout their working lives and to use them at times when their children or other dependents are in need of care.

Intel Ireland Ltd has invested around £600,000 (about € 762,000) in childcare programmes, particularly online family support sites (medical assistance, crèches, etc.), a childcare development fund, summer camps for employees' children, seminars on childcare for parents, and so on.

In Germany Deutsche Bahn AG has implemented a child support service that makes it possible to reconcile working hours with nursery school opening hours by adapting the working arrangements of staff with small children to the latter.

3.2. *Creating care services for the elderly*

The rising numbers of senior citizens who are dependent on workers and the need to provide them with special care can raise difficulties when it comes to reconciling work and family life.

In such cases it becomes crucial to create care services, but also to make it possible for both male and female workers to adopt working arrangements that make it easier for them to support elderly family members.

The move towards the creation of home services and the existence of proximity care services for senior citizens, with which employers enter into preferential agreements for the provision of this type of support to their staff, are measures which should be encouraged in companies.

Examples of good practices:

In Portugal

The IT company IBM provides health insurance not only for its staff and their children and grandchildren, but also for their parents and grandparents. Many of the company's employees take this opportunity to give added support to their parents.

Elsewhere

Du Pont de Nemours Italy, a company operating in the chemical and energy sector which employs around 500 staff, has had part-time positions available at all career levels, since 1986. The objective is to make it possible for staff to have time to look after their children and elderly dependents.

The National Bank of Greece offers its staff's parents an extended health fund, which includes financial support and family counselling.

3.3. Parental leave for working fathers and mothers

Any policy for reconciling work and family life should ensure that working parents are entitled to time off in order to take care of their family.

It is important to note that a balanced distribution of family support leave between women and men makes it easier for the former to take on professional responsibilities and secure career advancement. It can also attenuate the culture of the "total availability" which men are supposed to display in some workplaces and which often almost precludes their "right to a private life". At the same time it avoids marginalising the father's role in bringing up the children and ensures

that the latter enjoy their right to be cared for by, and establish bonds with, their father.

With a view to implementing measures to improve balance between work and family life, some companies go beyond the legal requirements and either on their own initiative, or via collective bargaining, give their staff family support leave for longer periods than those laid down by law.

In addition to the extension of compulsory family support leave, there are other examples of measures that represent improvements to existing arrangements. Some of the most important include: not reducing an employee's salary in any way; maintaining the right to promotions and to keeping the same job; allowing staff the right to shorter working hours in order to breastfeed children and care for them in other ways in the period immediately following their birth; and allowing staff to work flexible hours in order to care for their children.

Examples of good practices:

At Hewlett-Packard in Germany, family support leave goes beyond the legal requirements and the company has adopted a specific system for reintegrating staff when they come back to work.

Germany's Bayer Ac, which was one of the first companies to receive the "Total-E-Quality" award, offers a period of parental leave for use at any time until a child is seven years old. With a view to reconciling its staff's professional and family lives, Bayer has developed a flexible work system (part-time, shifts, etc.) and given them the option to take a sabbatical leave in the knowledge that they can then return to their original position.

Also in Germany, Hitech International Services GmbH has set up a system for keeping in touch with staff who take parental leave. The primary objective of this system is to update information during the leave period and to prepare the employee's return to work, to which end it also arranges workshops and meetings with the personnel department.

In Ireland AIB Bank is well known for a working formula that makes it easier for staff to take leave under special conditions, particularly: short breaks when they need to spend some time with their families; leave due to health reasons, illness or related incapacity; short breaks for people who want to spend the school holidays with their children; career interruptions of between 6 months and 5 years; and so on.

Portuguese Law

The Labour Code approved by Law no. 99/2003, of 27th August 2003, and Law no. 35/2004, of 29th July 2004, which regulates the Labour Code, provides in particular for the following:

Paternity/maternity leave – Enables a father or mother to care for her/his newly born child. In Portugal this leave lasts for 120 consecutive days (in case of multiple births the period of leave is extended by 30 days for each twin). 90 of the total 120 days must be taken after the birth. The mother must take 6 weeks after the birth, but in the event of the mother's death or physical or psychological incapacity, or if both parents so decide, the remainder can be taken by the father. The leave is considered a period of service, except as regards remuneration. It entitles the mother or father to a benefit that is paid by social security, or to normal remuneration when she/he is a

civil servant. Law no. 35/2004 introduced the option of a 150-day maternity leave. However, in this case the maternity benefit or remuneration is 80% of her reference wage, instead of the normal 100% (Executive Law no. 77/2005, dated 13 April 2005).

Paternity leave – In addition to the paternity leave mentioned above, fathers are entitled to 5 days of paid leave, which can be taken either consecutively or separately, during the month following childbirth. This 5-day paternity leave is compulsory.

Parental leave – Fathers and mothers are entitled to parental leave (this leave is not paid, but is taken into account when calculating invalidity and old age pensions) in order to care for natural or adopted children up to the age of six. This leave may be taken in one of the following ways:

- a) Full-time for 3 months.
- b) Part-time for 12 months.
- c) In up to three periods, full-time and part-time, provided the total duration of the leave equals 3 months of normal work.

When they are taken by the father, the first 15 days of parental leave are paid by social security (or the State, if the father is a civil servant), on condition that the leave is taken immediately after the maternity or paternity leave.

Breastfeeding leave – Mothers who prove that they are breastfeeding are entitled to time off work each day, which they must take in two separate periods of up to one hour each, for as long as breastfeeding

continues, unless some other arrangement is agreed with the employer. In the event that the mother does not breastfeed her child, until the latter's first birthday either she or the father (they must decide together which of them) is entitled to the same time off work in order to feed the baby.

Special leave to care for children – The main objective of this leave, which may be taken by either the mother or the father, is to give workers the chance to spend more time with their children and take a more active part in their upbringing.

Once parental leave has been used up, in Portugal working fathers and mothers are entitled to special leave to care for their natural or adopted children. This leave lasts for up to 2 years (3 in the case of the birth of a third child) and can be taken consecutively or in several shorter periods.

The employment relationship of employees who take this special leave is suspended, particularly as regards remuneration. However, the special leave period is taken into account when calculating invalidity and old age pensions.

Leave for adoption of children under the age of fifteen – This leave applies solely to cases involving the adoption of children under the age of 15 years.

This leave lasts for 100 consecutive days. If there are two adoptive parents, they can share the leave between them. Adoption leave is considered a period of service, except as regards remuneration.

Leave to care for a disabled or chronically ill person – The law entitles parents (mother or father) to up to six months leave, which can then be extended for up to four years, in order to care for a natural, adopted or stepchild who lives with the parent in question and is disabled, up to the child's twelfth birthday. This type of leave is fundamental to promoting a balance of roles between fathers and mothers.

The law also grants the following rights:

- Working fathers or mothers (one or the other) may be absent from work for up to 30 days per annum in order to provide indispensable care that cannot be delayed, to ill or injured natural, adopted or stepchildren who are below the age of ten, or who are disabled, whatever their age.
- Working grandfathers or grandmothers (one or the other) may be absent from work for up to 30 consecutive days following the birth of grandchildren who are the children of teenagers below the age of sixteen, on condition that the latter live with them.
- Working fathers or mothers (one or the other) are entitled to special working conditions, particularly a reduction in their normal working hours, in order to care for natural or adopted children who are disabled or chronically ill. In the case of children below the age of one year, this reduction is five hours off the normal working week.
- Working fathers or mothers (one or the other) with one or more children below the age of twelve (no age limit for disabled children) are entitled to work part-time or with flexible working hours.

Reconciling work and family life also entails giving fathers the conditions they need to care for their families, in such a way as to bring about a more balanced participation of both parents in the upbringing of their children, as well as gender equality regarding career opportunities.

To this end, creating parental leave for working parents who maintain their employment relationship, and recognising that men also have the right to take on family responsibilities and care for their children and other family members, are deemed to be good practices that companies should encourage and pursue.

3.4. Incentives for fathers to participate more in family life

In Portugal, as in other countries, men generally work full-time and continue to make little use of family support leaves. However, some recent studies have shown that the younger generations of men tend to play a more active part in bringing up their children.

Companies that implement policies for reconciling work and family life should provide an organisational culture which recognises the importance of the father's role in children's socialisation, and which urges men to take advantage of the specific forms of leave that have been created for working fathers. In doing so they must also guarantee fathers that they will keep their jobs and that the promotion and bonus system will continue to apply to them.

Companies that have adopted such best practices state that male staff who take the various types of parental leave available to look after

their young children, improve their performance at work. They become more active and collaborative, which in turn creates a friendlier working environment.

A few countries have adopted good practices to encourage fathers' participation in family life, which include creating schools where men specifically learn to look after children. Such initiatives should be preceded by awareness-raising actions, so as to do away with prejudice and change attitudes and practices.

Examples of good practices:

In Portugal

IBM has been trying to increase fathers' roles by internally publicising accounts written by male staff who have small children and share the work of looking after their families.

Working fathers at Caixa Económica Montepio Geral have taken unpaid leave to look after underage children, in accordance with the current law on the protection of maternity and paternity.

Elsewhere

Konrad Ess, a department head in the credit sector of Hypo Bank in Munich, Germany, cut his working week to four days in order to be able to be with his children on the extra day off. His colleagues were sceptical when he decided to work part-time, but now they see it as normal. Their work is strictly results-oriented and Mr Ess's career has not been affected by his choice – indeed, since then he has moved up a grade within the bank.

Also in Germany, every month the Freie Holzwerkstatt company in Freising gives its male staff the option to take a few hours of

paid leave under the slogan “time to benefit your children”. It also allows workers to accumulate these hours from one month to another.

In Netherlands the Haaglanden Police Force joined a system that makes it easier for part-time male workers to care for their children. This system helps overcome the prejudice that women are expected to take responsibility for looking after children, and encourages men to take a more active part in family responsibilities and to work part-time.

3.5. Flexible work organisation

Companies that adopt measures for reconciling work and family life seek to adapt forms of work in order to meet their employees’ needs. This leads to greater levels of satisfaction amongst staff and to optimisation of the company’s human resources. This in turn helps to improve the quality of the work and services provided and thus the quality of the company as a whole.

Among the range of measures that can be taken in order to make work more flexible we find:

- a) Actually reducing the number of hours worked, so as to create a better balance between work and family life.
- b) Adjusting and improving the flexibility of working hours by negotiating a minimum number of hours to be worked each year, or creating “time banks”. Rather than complying with a rigid work schedule, staff should be responsible for achieving objectives.

- c) Compressing working hours into a shorter week so as to increase the number of free days available for rest and family life.
- d) Adopting teleworking practices, particularly for staff who live a considerable distance away from their workplace, thereby avoiding the fatigue and loss of time that daily travel causes in such situations. Although teleworking needs to be managed properly in order to avoid the effects of isolation, this system not only stops people wasting time on travel, but can also indirectly help reduce road traffic in major urban centres.

Examples of good practices:

In Portugal

Bruno Janz – a company that produces precision instruments – allows its employees to take anywhere between 30 minutes and 2 hours for lunch, thereby reducing or increasing the total number of hours in their working day to enable them to take care of personal or family matters.

Caixa Económica Montepio Geral has shown interest in promoting measures for reconciling its employees' work and family life, and to this end has made their working hours more flexible. Employees are able to choose from different types of working hour schemes, and can also ask to be transferred to branches where opening hours are more convenient for them. In specific situations they can also telework and use a system that promotes workplace mobility in accordance with where they live and their family and personal needs. Students who work for the bank can adjust their working hours around their school schedule.

In order to facilitate reconciliation of work, family and personal life, Salvador Caetano, a company in the car industry, gives its employees the option to work either part or full-time. For the same reason, in certain circumstances, it sometimes allows them to work in small workshops at home. Besides being an example of good practice in reconciling work and family life, in this way the company also ensures a fast, high quality service for its customers.

Tavares de Oliveira, a tax consultancy firm, allows its staff to compress their normal working hours into a smaller number of days. To help its employees achieve a better balance between the time that they spend at work and the time they have available for family and personal commitments, the company offers flexitime in accordance with the particular projects that each member of staff is working on.

A. Silva Matos, a metalworking company, allows its employees to juggle work and academic studies or vocational training, and in some cases permits them to stop working altogether for a time. Many of its staff have gone from having only completed their compulsory education to becoming university graduates while still being employed by the company.

The telecommunications company Portugal Telecom (PT) has organised a working time management system that entailed creating a 'time bank'. This is a means of managing working time flexibly to help staff reconcile work, family and personal responsibilities. PT also has employees with disabled family members, who telework from home; and it promotes part-time working (3 to 4 hours a day, or at weekends) by young university students.

The IT company IBM also promotes teleworking and provides staff with a laptop computer and Internet access. When

necessary, they can thus work from home without any additional cost to themselves or the company. The staff members themselves refer to this solution as an example of good practice in reconciling work and family life.

The electricity company EDP – Electricidade de Portugal also offers flexible working hours to some of its workers. In addition to a flexible system that only requires staff to be present during key periods of the day and allows them to manage the rest of their time themselves, it also allows them to accumulate a certain number of hours that they can use when they need to take care of personal or family matters.

The textile company Silva e Sistelo has set up a work organisation model based on self-managing groups to make its female employees more versatile and give them greater accountability. Staff thus know how the whole production system works, and are given more autonomy and responsibilities. Management now plays a coordinating role and staff feel more motivated. This has in turn led to a fall in absenteeism – something that is particularly important in helping to fight the stereotype that absenteeism is especially prevalent among women. The company has also introduced a flexitime system which allows workers to accumulate hours that they can use on other days of the year.

At PROCAL, which supplies components for the footwear industry, the 40-hour working week is compressed into four-and-a-half days. By individual agreement, staff can also increase the number of hours they work each day and thus work only four days a week.

PLASTIDOM, a plastics manufacturing company, operates 24 hours a day in two groups of three 8-hour shifts, in which staff alternate between working Monday to Friday and Wednesday to Sunday. When they move from one schedule to the other they

get four consecutive days off, which they know about long enough in advance to plan their family lives accordingly.

Heska Portuguesa – Industrias Tipográficas, S. A. conducts a variety of training courses and programmes which are primarily designed to provide its employees with practical know-how that makes it easier for them to adapt to the new technologies in the printing sector.

Elsewhere

In Germany the industrial company Dragerwerk AG employs 5,300 workers, most of whom are men. It has been operating flexitime arrangements for more than twenty years, including:

- a 32-hour working week (two free afternoons).
- a 20-hour working week (part-time).
- a 25-hour working week (19 hours at the company and 6 hours at home).
- an 18-hour working week (3 days a week, 6 hours a day).
- a 20-hour week (one job shared by two workers in the administrative department).

Since 1978 employees who work in the purchasing department at Beck in Munich have been able to choose their working hours. During the first years of the scheme the proportion of part-time work increased from 30 to 60%. As a result it was possible to create 10% more jobs.

In Germany BMW has introduced a working system that it calls “Bayern (Bavaria) online”. It enables administrative staff to simultaneously telework and share a job in the office.

Mercedes Benz in Spain operates flexitime schemes allowing employees to choose their start time, lunch hours, and the number of hours worked each week. There is a tolerance of ten

hours that are then added to the following month. During summer months employees who accumulate enough hours over the course of the week can choose not to work on the Friday afternoon.

In Belgium, Dexia Bank offers flexitime allowing employees to choose their start time (between 7.30 and 10.00 a.m.), and to work a minimum of four-and-three-quarter hours a day. Staff can make up the remaining hours on other days. Around 2% of the Bank's overall workforce have already opted to telework, either on a permanent basis, or alternating with work at the company. The level of satisfaction with which this system is regarded by both management and employees shows that its use is likely to become more widespread in the future.

4. Equal opportunities practices

Implementing strategies and practices designed to reconcile work and family life helps to promote equal opportunities for women and men in both the world of work and society in general. Companies that are committed to this goal should firstly carry out an assessment of the work situations within the organisation. To this end they can gather information by asking staff to complete questionnaires and by interviewing people who know the company well³.

³ Also see chapter 6 in this manual.

The objective is to:

- Draw up a list of staff numbers by age, function, seniority, qualifications, and gender.
- Get staff to voice their opinions, representations and expectations, in such a way as to highlight any difficulties that may exist in reconciling their work and personal lives (not just in terms of their families, but also as regards training and citizenship practices), as well as to single out any gender inequalities in the tasks of men and women and in career advancement.

Examples of good practices:

In Portugal the state television company RTP's CONFATRA Project was designed to help reconcile work and family life. Staff were asked to fill in a questionnaire about their needs in terms of family life and about various measures, such as new forms of work organisation, job sharing, teleworking and flexitime, the creation of a network of baby-sitters with the training needed to provide a quality service, and databases covering a variety of services to support family life. The company has also pursued a policy of training women in traditionally male technological fields and then incorporating them into its staff.

Bruno Janz recently created a Human Rights Group. Among other things, the Group seeks to provide information about equal opportunities and proposes discussions on this topic among company staff.

The printing company Heska has recently responded to concerns about ensuring that growth is balanced and promotes equal

opportunities for all staff, be they men or women, by creating an Equal Opportunities Committee made up of workers from different departments within the company. Its first task in this field was to hand out a Manual of Best Practices.

Salvador Caetano encourages its male staff to participate in the care of their children.

The airline TAP has pushed for the entry of women into jobs that are traditionally held by men, such as commercial airline pilots, ramp operators, and aircraft maintenance technicians.

Friedrich Grohe Portuguesa, a metalworking company, has tried to reduce horizontal and vertical segregation that affects women in its area of business, by promoting and supporting the employment of female staff in areas that are traditionally male-dominated, such as sanding/polishing work.

The equal opportunities policy at the publisher and book distributor Texto Editora is set out in a welcome manual that is given to every member of staff when he/she joins the company. The manual states that no employee may be discriminated against because of gender, and that equality is one of the organisation's basic principles. The company also has a quality committee that ensures compliance with this policy.

Silva Matos Metalomecânica S.A. encourages its male employees to accompany their children when they go to the doctor.

The idea behind creating work/family reconciliation practices that promote equal opportunities is to come up with flexible working schedules and conditions that enable staff, whatever their gender, to

tend to the needs of their personal lives better, without prejudicing their professional careers in the process.

Employers have a fundamental role to play in achieving these objectives. They can do this not only by ensuring the implementation of a range of measures designed to balance family and professional life, but also because they can raise their staff's awareness of these issues by taking specific actions and guaranteeing that they all enjoy equal treatment rights in terms of pay and benefits, promotions, and access to vocational training and other social benefits.

Possible actions include:

- A. Forms of work organisation which promote better work/life balance: flexible working hours that fit family needs; job sharing; the option to accumulate hours worked and then use them to take days off; not holding meetings and training actions outside working hours.
- B. Ensuring equal access to all positions, occupations and careers, and promotions and other forms of career advancement.
- C. Creating a database with every kind of service that could be useful to staff with children or elderly dependents: crèches, nursery schools, day centres, old-age support services, and proximity services, such as laundry and ironing services, ready-made meals and so on.
- D. Appointing someone in the human resource department to manage this database and help deal with staff needs by acting as a contact point with the services that they ask for.

- E. Establishing childcare facilities within company premises, run by qualified staff, where employees can arrange to leave their children when they need to. This service could be available all year round for the whole or part of the normal working day, or just during school holidays.
- F. Organising museum visits, excursions, or other outings for employees' children during school holidays or outside school hours.
- G. Organising home care services for employees' elderly dependents.
- H. Developing ways of staying in touch with the company, such as training courses or the provision of regular information, for staff on leave or who telework and do not get to interact with colleagues.
- I. Ensuring that pregnant women are not exposed to unsafe and hazardous working conditions.
- J. Giving pregnant women leave to attend childbirth classes.

5. Other practical cases

Measures adopted by private companies:

Caixa Económica Montepio Geral allows its staff to take time off work in order to study or go on training courses, to improve its employees' qualifications. It also offers them benefits above and beyond those required by law, by paying all or part of the costs of their training. People who take advantage of this possibility are allowed to make up the lost work later on.

In 1997 Germany's Ministry for the Family gave the textile firm Rosch in Tubigen the award for the "most family-friendly" company.

The company produces clothes and car textiles. Out of a total of 325 employees, 99 work flexitime, 51 of them on a part-time basis.

Examples of good practice within the company include a crèche and kindergarten. Parents can spend their lunch breaks with their children at the company canteen or in a special recreational area that was created specially for the purpose.

Rosch also offers a varied range of work options: staff can reduce the number of hours they work every day, or just work fewer hours on given days when they need to take care of personal and family needs.

For the employer, agreeing flexible working hours with its staff in advance represents a strategy for increasing productivity. One of the managers emphasised that "If we didn't have 99 solutions, we would have 99 more problems in the workplace".

Thanks to this system staff are more motivated and absenteeism has fallen. The company has increased its productivity fourfold, which more than makes up for the costs of the kindergarten, swimming pool and other recreational areas (services that are all free to employees).

In Greece Philip Morris Hellas AEBE has implemented a programme against family violence.

Also in Greece, the TITAN S.A. Cement Company has pursued a family and professional life reconciliation policy. It offers group or individual psychological counselling sessions to couples who work for the company, organises excursions, Christmas and other parties, and summer holidays for employees' children, and organises an annual "Creative Activities" event jointly with other bodies. At the beginning of the school year it also hands out school materials and organises a "Vocational Guidance" course for employees' children who are in the second and third years of secondary education.

In Belgium Dexia Bank arranges for staff to be able to take one day off a week (Wednesdays). Although this measure is particularly aimed families with small children, any employee can opt for the system, whatever his/her sex or position in the company.

In Portugal

Examples of good practice at FAMARI, a cardboard manufacturer, include the creation of a canteen where employees can take free meals during and just before and after night shifts. Attached to the canteen is a games room where staff can spend time together during the rest of their lunch breaks or when their shifts change. The company also organises a variety of sporting and recreational activities, and at the end of each year distributes part of its net profits among its employees.

The cutlery manufacturing firm ICEL has a canteen offering meals at low prices, from which staff can also take ready-cooked meals home at the end of the day. Employees' children also have access to this service, as well as a space where they can play or study before and after school.

The company has carried out a review of its pay system to reduce the pay gaps between men and women that characterise this sector of business.

Where flexibility is concerned, the company practices what it calls “mutual flexibility”. This involves mutual agreements between employer and employees, whereby the latter can take time off to deal with family matters and then make it up later.

The real estate company José Santos, Lda. operates flexible working hours and follows recruitment processes that make it easier to reconcile professional and family life. In particular it hires staff from the area near the workplace and allows people to take longer meal breaks so that they can go home to eat. It also offers flexible working hours to accommodate employees’ personal needs and family responsibilities.

All of Grafe’s employees are entitled to health insurance with 80% of the cost paid by the company, the use of a gym that is paid for by the company, and free access to acupuncture at weekly in-house sessions with a specialist practitioner.

6. Social Audits:

Leading indicators of good practices

Research conducted in Portugal⁴ has been looking at a range of issues and identifying the ways in which employers organise their staff’s professional life and take account of their family needs. The practical

⁴ Maria das Dores Guerreiro, *A Conciliação entre Trabalho e Vida Familiar nas empresas portuguesas*, CIES-ISCTE.

examples that are presented in this guide have been tested in real-life situations and many of them can usefully be included in a social audit⁵ process designed to bring in ways of reconciling work and family life and furthering equal opportunities for women and men, as part of overall programmes for fostering companies' social responsibility⁶.

The main indicators identified are:

- **Information on the company/organisation**, including area of business, date of formation, location, and number of employees.
- **Information on employees**, including age, academic qualifications, marital and family status (children, elderly dependents, etc.), occupational category, years of service, type of employment contract, whether other family members work for the same company, and gender.
- **Degree of knowledge within the company about worker's work-family needs**, including how long they have been aware of it and how they found out what they know.
- **Awareness of employees' needs** for work-family reconciliation.
- **Work/family reconciliation measures** that are in place at the company, namely:
 - **Working time arrangements**, number of hours worked per week, overtime, flexitime, part-time work, reduced working hours, shift work, telework, job-sharing, compressed working weeks, etc.

⁵ For more information on this subject, particularly as regards the other European countries, see New Ways, no. 1/98, European Commission – DGV (G 44764).

⁶ In this regard, see the European Commission Green Paper (2001), *Promoting a European framework for corporate social responsibility*.

- ***Paid and unpaid family leaves***, Including maternity and paternity leaves, as well as leaves to care for sick children and elderly persons.
- ***Paid and unpaid leaves for education and vocational training***.
- ***Support facilities and services for employees***, such as canteens, crèches, medical services, transport, insurance, loans, and family care allowances.
- ***Support for elderly and retired employees***, including holiday programmes, day-to-day help, assistance in the event of illness, etc.
- ***Promotion systems and vocational training or retraining programmes*** according to the gender of the employees in question.
- ***Recreational activities***, company parties, sporting activities, a company newspaper in which employees and their families take part.
- **Sectors in which such measures apply or not, and why.**
- **Other measures that are planned** in the work/family reconciliation field.
- **Other feasible measures that could be implemented, but are not planned.**
- **Problem situations related to the need to reconcile work and family responsibilities, in particular:**
 - ***Absenteeism*** and the reasons for it, by employee gender, age, academic qualifications, and family situation.
 - ***Departures from the company*** due to dismissal or resignation, and the reasons for them.

- **Measures which are difficult to put into practice at the company, but which would make family life easier.**
- **Measures that are needed, but would be difficult to put into practice.**
- **Interesting measures that deserve to be studied.**
- **Joint projects with the surrounding community, such as crèches, care centres for the elderly, shared or community transport systems.**
- **Partners with whom to pursue projects of this kind, such as local authorities, other companies, non-governmental organisations, etc.**
- **Measures which the company feels that other bodies ought to implement.**

These are some of the elements based on the data gathered from the world of work in Portugal and other European countries, which constitute a methodological instrument for carrying out social audits.

They will contribute to the development of work-family practices that, in turn, will help promote equal opportunities for men and women at work, improve workers' quality of life and well-being, and improve the quality of the products and services provided by companies.

With the appropriate adjustments they could be generalised and applied to all the different types of company that exist in our country.

7. Advantages for companies

A company policy that helps reconcile work and family life brings a whole range of advantages, namely it:

1. Stimulates employee creativity and motivation, improves communication between managers and operational staff, and contributes to a better understanding of the organisation's objectives and culture.
2. Makes it easier to introduce new working methods and new technologies, thereby in particular making better use of the company's technology capital.
3. Can lead to a reduction in staff turnover and the consequent savings in recruitment costs.
4. Reduces training costs, inasmuch as it helps retain qualified human resources.
5. Increases productivity by leading to work schedules that are better suited to employees' needs, thereby avoiding unplanned absenteeism.
6. Broadens and diversifies the range of people who may be interested in working for a company that offers them good working conditions which do not conflict with their family responsibilities.

7. Provides organisations with a greater variety of resources, skills and points of view, as a result of employee diversity.
8. Helps reduce industrial disputes.
9. Attracts new customers, particularly in some areas, as a result of new working time arrangements.
10. Brings tax advantages – the costs of creating the services involved (for both children and the elderly) are tax deductible.
11. Improves the company's image in both the immediate community and at the international level, thereby helping to promote its products and increase its turnover.
12. Enables the company to apply for grants, which in turn helps to publicise its good practices and social responsibility activities and thereby increase its market recognition and visibility.

8. European Directives

Main Community and European international regional legal instruments on the reconciliation of work and family life

A. Community legislation

The main Community legislative measures on equal opportunities that can be said to be particularly important to the reconciliation of family and professional responsibilities are:

- Directive on **parental leave** (96/34)

Calls for both men and women workers to be given an individual right to parental leave on the grounds of the birth or adoption of a child, in order to enable them to take care of that child, for at least three months, until he/she reaches a given age of up to 8 years.

The Directive also provides that employees should be allowed to take time off work on grounds of *force majeure* for urgent family reasons in cases of sickness or accident that make the immediate presence of the worker indispensable.

- **Directive 2002/73/EC, amending Directive 76/73/EEC, on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions**

Grants women on maternity leave the right to return to their job or to an equivalent post at the end thereof on terms and conditions which are no less favourable to them, and to benefit from any improvement in working conditions to which they would have been entitled during their absence.

Requires those Member States which recognise rights to parental and adoption leave to grant working men and women the right to

protection during their exercise thereof, and to ensure that, at the end of such leave, they are entitled to return to their jobs or to equivalent posts on terms and conditions which are no less favourable to them, and to benefit from any improvement in working conditions to which they would have been entitled during their absence.

- Directive **on pregnant workers** (92/85)

Lays down minimum requirements for safeguarding the health and safety of workers who are pregnant, have recently given birth, or are breastfeeding. It also provides that maternity leave shall last for at least 14 consecutive weeks and shall be paid and that dismissal of women in such situations shall be prohibited.

- Resolution (2000/C 218/02) **on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life**

Encourages the Member States to adopt measures to protect both male and female workers exercising rights relating to paternity, maternity or to the reconciling of working and family life, and to promote a balanced participation of men and women in family and working life as one of the basic conditions for *de facto* equality.

B. Council of Europe

- **Revised European Social Charter**

Recognises that workers of both sexes with family responsibilities are entitled to equal opportunities and equal treatment, and recommends that States take appropriate measures to enable them to remain in employment, and take account of their needs in terms of conditions of employment and social security, and develop or promote services, public or private, in particular child daycare services and other childcare arrangements.

- Council Recommendation on **childcare** (92/241/EC)

This Recommendation encourages initiatives in the following areas:

1. Providing childcare services while parents are at work or on training courses.
2. Making organisations more responsible and responsive to the needs of working parents.
3. Providing incentives and support for men to play a greater role in caring for their children.
4. Allowing flexibility as to how parental leave may be taken.

9. Conclusion

The ultimate objective of this Good Practice Guide is to provide insight into business management procedures and practices which, in the light of the changes in our contemporary societies, can be introduced to modernise employment relationships. These procedures involve introducing measures that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life.

This Guide is thus a working tool for employers who are looking for an initial idea of what they can do to promote the necessary balance between these two spheres of our personal lives – work and the family.

The set of measures presented in this Guide is not intended as an exhaustive list, but rather a number of suggestions as to the many things that can be done to promote equal opportunities and avoid both the vertical and horizontal segregation that characterises women's employment currently. At the same time it provides practical solutions to the problems that families are experiencing in modern societies, in which both women and men work.

As each company has its own characteristics, this Guide seeks to raise employers' awareness of key current issues and to provide them with a broad range of measures from which they can choose those which will most easily enable them to optimise their human capital's potential, improve their competitiveness, and promote corporate social responsibility.

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