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Parents@Work: Changing Perceptions!



1st Newsletter of the project:

“Parents@Work: Changing Perceptions!”

Dear reader,

Through this newsletter we would like to inform you about a new project that is carried out in Croatia and Austria by L&R Research, CESI – Center for Education, Counseling and Research –, the Ombud for Equal Treatment in Austria and the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality in Croatia.

The Project has started in June 2019 and will be implemented until June 2021.

Why do we think this project is needed?

Parents are disadvantaged in workplaces because of their parenting or childcare responsibilities. This has been shown in research as well as through experience gained by counselling agencies such as state equality bodies.

The discrimination often begins in pregnancy and later women continue to do the majority of childcare tasks. Thus, they are much more negatively affected than men. If men take on family responsibilities, they do not meet the “masculine” role perception and are then also discriminated against in the workplace. The discrimination may include pejorative remarks, deterioration in work atmospheres, designation to inferior tasks and even the termination of the employment.

Discrimination usually occurs due to prejudices: parents are seen as being less flexible, productive and professionally involved and causing organisational difficulties to the employers because of their parenting responsibilities. Changing the attitudes of companies, parenting employees themselves and society in general is necessary. This would lead to a more positive perception and reduce discrimination against parents in the workplace. This is precisely the goal of the parents@work project.

What is the empirical evidence so far?

Ombudspersons for Equal Rights show that parents and in particular women are facing discrimination as parents at work (e.g. Adams et al. 2016). Several studies investigated the influence of gender and parental status on employment decisions (see e.g. Fuegen et al. 2004) and indicated that parents were judged as less active and less committed to their jobs than non-parents. According to these studies parental status also interacted with gender, indicating that fathers were not judged in the same way as mothers.

A recent experimental study conducted in Germany, Switzerland and Austria investigated the effect of a candidate's family status in hiring practices. The results show that married, but childless women and women with younger children are disadvantaged in comparison to single women or women with older children. These effects were only found for women applying for part-time jobs, whereas family status did not affect hiring decisions concerning women applying for full time jobs. In the case of male candidates, information about a person's family situation did not have any effect.

Direct or indirect discrimination ranges from a deterioration of the working climate over assignment to inferior activities to the loss of the job. This was also shown in a survey by the legal advice department of the Austrian Chamber of Labour. In the period of three months, nearly 80 cases of parental discrimination were raised in the counselling. That means there was at least one case per workday.

In 2016 the Ombudsperson for Gender Equality of the Republic of Croatia initiated 26 anti-discrimination cases based on complaints on the violation of maternity rights - 21% of all complaints related to labour rights, including equality in wages. Individually, complaints were submitted in 65% of cases by women and in 21% cases by men. In the remaining 8% of cases the proceedings were initiated by the Ombudsperson's initiative. In 5,5% cases complaints were submitted by groups of both sexes (see Ombudsperson for Gender Equality 2016).

The Ombud for Equal Treatment Austria has made the experience that apart from equal pay and sexual harassment, cases concerning the compatibility of family and career make an essential part of its advisory services in the field of gender discrimination.

Examples show different forms of discrimination employees are facing. The unfair treatment at the workplace is often caused by prejudices, which also cover parents respectively people with caring responsibilities. Prejudices are preconceived attitudes and opinions towards certain social groups, which often do not base on own experiences.

They arise from the fact that judgments, views or opinions that exist in our society are taken over and are transferred to individuals, without verifying their actual truthfulness in reality: "Mothers are less productive and flexible", for example, is a widespread prejudice. As Caroline Waters (EHRC) stated at an event of Equinet on the topic of "parenthood penalty":

"The perception of working parents and pregnant women should change from business burden to business benefit. Additionally, while the impact on the economy is significant, it is important to remember that equality in employment is predominantly a moral imperative leading to the design of legislation and must play a role in ensuring no implementation gaps (Equinet/EHRC 2016)."

What is our mission?

In the scope of the project "Parents@work: Changing Perceptions!" the following activities are planned:

- Increasing awareness of (hidden) discrimination of mothers and fathers in the workplace and in job applications among employees and employers as well as a broader public;
- Developing new strategies to support employers and employees to combat discriminatory practices and new tools (information material, workshops, youtube clips) adapted to the needs of affected people and organizations;
- Support gender equality bodies and other counselling organizations with materials and tools – including you-tube clips – for their counselling work and their awareness-raising activities;
- Involve companies and social partners in research and in awareness-raising activities to help them changing their practices.

Who are important stakeholders and target groups?

- Experts of Gender Equality Bodies and other counselling actors in this field
- Parents respectively caregivers who are discriminated against at workplace or when applying for a job.
- Enterprises, their representatives and social partners.
- A broader public

The aim is to sensitize for the scope of (hidden) discrimination and the benefits that can arise by an increased knowledge on what discrimination in the relevant area can be. The discussions will invite people to rethink their images and often traditional conceptions of parenthood, arrangements of child care duties and work-life-balance in general.

What are our main activities at the moment?

At the moment we are conducting our research: interviews with former clients of equality body and counselling services to find out what happened some years after intervention and how they assess the process retrospectively. This approach is a new one in the involved countries – up to now there are no studies which reveal what happens to clients years after they actively fight discriminatory practices.

Additionally, we are preparing research with companies: focus groups and an online-survey are planned, where we also want to use new approaches and an experimental design to reveal good practices but also (hidden and often unconscious) discrimination.

The aim is to develop instruments that lead to avoid the “unconscious bias” and support the enterprises with ideas to better adjust these processes. The participating enterprises will also be promoted in the project as “best-practice-enterprises” (for example be presented on the project website) and can therefore be models for other enterprises in the area of work-life-balance.

Together with the Ombud for Equal Treatment of Austria and Ombudsperson for Gender Equality of the Republic of Croatia and other counselling institutions, social partners etc., new tools (information material, workshops, youtube clips) adapted to the needs of affected people and organizations are to be developed.

Companies interested in participating as “Good-Practice-Companies” as well as former clients who want to share their experiences are warmly welcomed to contact us:

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First partner's meeting in Vienna

On July 17th, the project partners have met in Vienna at our first meeting which we have used as opportunity to discuss the main goals and activities which are going to be implemented in the first part of the project. That includes a research part as well as promotional activities, which are important for the visibility of the topic as such.



Project Partners:

L&R Social Research (www.lrsocialresearch.at)

Ombud for Equal Treatment Austria (www.gleichbehandlungsanwaltschaft.gv.at)

CESI - Center for Education, Counseling and Research (www.cesi.hr)

Ombudsperson for Gender Equality Croatia (www.prs.hr)

Project website: <https://parentsatwork.eu/>

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Supported by the Rights, Equality
and Citizenship Programme
of the European Union (2014-2020)



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