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Parents@Work: Changing Perceptions!



Newsletter 2. of the project:

“Parents@Work: Changing Perceptions!”

Dear reader,

Here is second newsletter of the project Parents@Work 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.

We are very happy we can show results of the work done so far in the research and analytical part of the project.

On the page 5 of the newsletter you can find announcement for the upcoming action we are taking in June, the survey for the companies. All of you, who are interested in taking the online survey, please check the link and take your part. We would be very grateful!

What is new?

The first activity of the project 'Parents@Work: Changing Perceptions!' was researching workers' perceptions and impressions of discrimination or difficulties they experienced in the workplace or in employment because they were or would become parents. Survey **participants were those workers who have faced discrimination in their professional life and who have contacted either Ombud of Equal Treatment in Austria and Ombudswoman for gender equality in Croatia or CESI, to gain legal support in their cases. Those specific cases were the matter of the survey** with the purpose **to better understand which underlying problems employees who are parents might face only due to the fact of trying to reconcile personal and professional life**, and how they perceive their employers dealing with this fact.

First, we wanted to see the causes and manifestations of discrimination or other difficulties that parents experience in their workplaces. Second, the goals are to find out what helps parents in these situations, what they expect from employers and how such problems can be avoided in the future.

Focusing on these topics, two studies were conducted, one in Austria and one in Croatia, picking two different methodological approaches. In Austria 18 qualitative face-to-face interviews with persons, who experienced discrimination because of (upcoming) parenthood, were conducted and analysed. In Croatia a total of 40 cases, of were analysed, through an online questionnaire and telephone interviews. In both cases the researchers were supported by the national equality bodies, Ombud of Equal Treatment and Ombudswoman for gender equality of the Republic of Croatia.

Findings in Austria

Beside displaying the individual stories of the analysed cases by showing what it means to be discriminated at the working place, displaying the negative consequences of discrimination on the affected persons and making visible the difficulties experienced by the interviewees in order of

fighting back against discrimination, the goal of the study was to look for structural conditions that foster discrimination for parenthood reasons. Five such structural conditions were identified.

First, stereotypical expectations on what role women and men should take on in a societal division of labour between “male” breadwinners and “female” carers, including some extra earning for mothers. This structural condition for example fosters discrimination against men, who want to reduce their working hours or consume parental leave. This deviance against the “classic” male role as the “breadwinner” was sanctioned in the analysed cases by discrimination. But also, women who had children and showed career ambitions, for example after their parental leave, do not fit into this stereotype pattern and were discriminated against out of it.

Second, the normative idea of only fulltime labour being sufficient labour was identified as a root of discrimination for parenthood reasons. Especially for management positions fulltime labour seems to be an informal requirement. The labour of parents therefore tends to be rated as insufficient, which leads to discrimination in many of the analysed cases.

Third, the idea of parenthood as something with negative effects on the performance of an employee leads to discrimination of parents. In the cases analysed, there was not a single evidence of parenthood being seen as a resource by the management.

Forth, many of the discriminated persons that were interviewed talked about a lack of rules and routines regarding the parenthood of employees. This lack of implemented supporting structures in favor of (becoming) parents in companies leads to the possibility of despotism through actors on the management level. Also, the organisational culture of companies plays an important role as potential catalyst of discrimination against parents. Discrimination happened in the analysed cases often in companies, where for example reducing weekly working hours for parenthood reasons is not a usual thing to do.

Fifth, also legal structures play an important role in the analysed cases. Most of the interviewees perceived the employer as way more powerful during their lawsuit; some did not even go to court because of this perception. So, the balance of power was not there, even though the employees were all supported by counselling organisations. Those who went to court suffered specially from the long duration of the proceedings. Those, who won their lawsuits, received small compensations, which did not really hurt the companies’ budget a lot. The outcome therefore was always worse for the discriminated ones, not for those, who discriminated.

What is important: These five structural conditions do not appear isolated but interfere with each other or underlie mostly unconscious the attitude of management personnel as they are underlying society in general.

Based on the identification of these five structural conditions, the final report contains recommendations on how to improve the situation of (becoming) parents in the world of work.

Findings in Croatia

We analysed several patterns that have emerged in the cases. First, we can say that still only few women report discrimination in the workplace or in employment processes, although most recognize that they are discriminated against. Likewise, very rarely do they decide to start court proceedings. Some of the reasons for not reporting discrimination are lack of information about their rights, distrust of the legal system and institutions, and fear of dismissal or mobbing.

Second, almost all respondents were dissatisfied with their employer's behaviour and felt that they did not show the willingness to solve the problem that arose. Most stated that other employees had similar problems in the workplace, and about half stated that they noticed different treatment of mothers and fathers. Two main causes of such behaviour by employers have been identified. One is that often, at employer level, there are no policies or procedures set in place to address the issue of anti-discrimination in more detail, or they are not properly conducted. Therefore, it is important to work on organizational culture of companies to develop measures and procedures to address such problems in the workplace.

The second cause to note is that women continue to be perceived as contributing less to work because of their caregiving role, and also, pregnancy/parenthood is not desirable in the workplace. It is necessary to work with companies to better understand the subject of work-life balance because in the cases parents, especially mothers, did not have any support from their employers in regard to their parenthood.

Furthermore, given the impact of the legislative structure in the analysed cases, it is important to strengthen the legislative framework regarding protection against discrimination. Also, more work should be done on informing parents about their rights. In addition, it is necessary to continuously inform the public about the work of the Gender Equality Ombudswoman and to encourage victims of discrimination to turn to this institution for protection. This especially concerns parents employed in the private sector, as they are less protected than workers in the public sector.

Although more women are recognizing discrimination and violation of their rights, more should be done to inform and educate workers and employers about discrimination and other difficulties experienced by parents in the workplace. It would also be helpful to develop tools for employers in order to improve the support and flexibility in reconciling personal and work obligations.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all employees for taking part in the case studies and for sharing their experiences with us – in the hope to contribute considerably to the improvement of other parents' working situation in near future.

A whole text of the - Summary of Case Studies conducted in Austria and Croatia: 'Parents@Work – Changing Perceptions!' - can be found on the following link:
<https://parentsatwork.eu/experiences-of-discrimination-at-the-workplace-based-on-parenthood-summary-of-case-studies-conducted-in-austria-and-croatia-parentswork-changing-perceptions/>

We have a FB page!

Project is now on the social network of Facebook so please like the page and see what news we share related to the topic of parenting and work.

FB link: [Parents-at-Work-Changing-Perceptions](#)

Upcoming actions

We have prepared a survey for the companies in the form of telephone interviews and an online-questionnaire, as we also want to use new approaches and an experimental design to reveal good practices but also (hidden and often unconscious) discrimination. Respecting situation and difficulties companies are facing nowadays and due to COVID-19, we have included several questions related to it.

Companies interested in participating as “Good-Practice-Companies” are warmly welcomed to contact us and/or to fill in the online questionnaire which you can find on the following link:

For Austria:

<https://lrsocialresearch.limequery.com/237462?lang=de>

For Croatia:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1vvWSr2KyC3NCOzrtCOo6ii8cguiuNbnD5jJiFuCJKZE/viewform?edit_requested=true

You can also contact us directly:

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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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