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Parents@Work: Changing Perceptions!



Newsletter 3. of the project:

“Parents@Work: Changing Perceptions!”

Dear reader,

Here is a third 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.

What is new?

The third activity of the project ‘Parents@Work: Changing Perceptions!’ research was conducted on the perspective of employers regarding employees who are parents, their needs and the opportunities that companies offer to meet them. The focus of the research is on the topic of reconciling work and private life (so called “work – life balance”) and the organizational culture of employers. The two surveys included questions addressing the following: needs of working parents, measures taken by employers to support working parents, Covid-19 and the new challenges posed as well as measures taken by employers to address these challenges, possibilities for further developing the issue of work-life balance and finally, how employers deal with concrete (fictitious) discrimination scenarios.

As we are facing very challenging times in both our private and professional lives, due to the pandemic of COVID 19, which is not only endangering our health but also our working life we have decided to put the focus on some of the findings regarding this topic.

All European states are securing financial measures to preserve working places and to support employers, but the challenge stays in organizing remote work, social interaction, level of stress and coping with it due to the reconciliation of private and working life while there is a high risk of staying healthy.

On the brighter side of this specific crisis and situation, in a short time period we have learned that there is a way to organize and reorganize working arrangements, business as well as education and some cultural life due to the fact we are living in online era.

Within our project and related to COVID -19, we have asked representatives of employers a following questions: “What additional challenges to working parents during Covid-19 are recognized by employers? What measures have been offered?”

In Austria The Covid-19 pandemic has presented working parents with additional challenges. For example, employers reported that parents who were unable to send their children to school or kindergarten (especially younger children), were overburdened by their workload. The simultaneous management of remote working and schooling from home was often perceived by parents as a great burden – especially when having to share **rather small living space**. According to the employers surveyed, **single parents were most negatively impacted** by the lockdown. Those working parents who were unable to move their work home because of necessary required on-site presence also faced special challenges. In many of these cases, individual solutions had to be found by the employers.

The surveyed employers endeavoured to broaden measures for working parents, for example by making working hours and locations (working from home) even more flexible, or by offering extended leave options. In some cases, working parents were also allowed to take temporary work leave or to work less than usual. The possibility of taking short-time work was also offered for this purpose. According to some employers, the special care time that was set up for working parents during the lockdown was also taken. In this context, working parents were able to arrange up to three weeks of being off work with their employers. For those who did not take advantage of special care time, either other – sometimes better – internal, individual arrangements were found to support the working parents, or no need for special care time was requested by working parents. In principle, the special care time and other special regulations for parents were welcomed by the surveyed employers and should be partially extended. Despite the advantages of special regulations, some of the employers surveyed also criticised the special care time due to its considerable bureaucracy (perceived as being

very complicated) as well as the communication of the prerequisites and conditions necessary to qualify for the special care time (perceived as too confusing).

In Croatia the topic of work – life balance was highly visible during the Covid - 19 pandemic. Parents worked from home, schools and kindergartens were closed, and most of the burden of helping children with their school obligations was borne by their parents. Although we do not yet have exact data, there are strong indications that most of the **care responsibilities fell on women** - they were the ones who had the burden of caring for children and the household. Additional problem was the **stress and pressure caused by spending time indoors**, which left consequences on mental health of parents and children. Almost all surveyed companies had employees with children aged 14 and younger and were affected by this crisis. Possibilities offered by companies during the corona crisis to support parents consisted mostly of working from home (of course because they did not have other options due to lockdown) but companies kept it as an option for employees even after the official lockdown. What is interesting is that almost none of the surveyed companies had the option of working from home before. When asked if they will keep it even after the pandemic, half of them answer positively while a third have not yet decided. In addition to working from home, most employers also provided parents with flexible working hours, and a third offered various options for taking childcare leave.

In the future, it will be important and interesting to see what and how we, as societies have changed during 2020 and with what consequences, for the future generations coming.

To give some possible solutions on the topic of working parents and gender equality, we have asked survey participants: “Which (further) approaches would be useful in improving working parents’ employment experiences?”

Employers in Austria think that ideal company policy should include: communication at eye level, a culture of appreciation, equal treatment of employees, active and mutual exchange between management and employees, use of the collective intelligence of all those involved, openness to optimisation/further development, and transparent and comprehensible decision-making and practice. In addition, overcoming negative attitudes towards working parents is also seen as an important goal for better compatibility of family and career. Negative attitudes could be overcome, for example, by emphasising the competences of working parents.

According to the employers interviewed, these include, above all, good time management, high resilience, situation-based ability to react, pronounced problem-solving skills, high stress resistance and composure, and good multitasking skills. In general, it is also imperative to actively reduce

negative prejudices through company communication and to raise awareness of compatibility of family and work among all employees.

In Croatia employers think that corporative culture is very important in creating open and supporting working environment and that should be created from the highest level. High management must be “promotor” of ethical and non-discrimination measures and actions within the companies. Parenting fathers are to be especially promoted and encouraged to take parental leave. Equality is a value they would focus on but not parents especially. Some mention special skills of parents such as multitasking, empathy for others, understanding and patience. But on a negative side, they mention burn outs - especially during COVID -19 situation but also with tight deadlines. If working from home is the “new normal” and having kids in online schooling, then it should be of high importance that employers recognize the needs of parents, especially mothers as workers with high stress level. Psychological support should also be something HR can deal with either through one on one coaching or team coaching.

We would like to express our sincere thanks to all companies for taking part in the survey and for sharing their experiences with us.

A whole text of the reports can be found in German and Croatian languages, on the following links:

For Austria:

https://parentsatwork.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2020/11/Forschungsbericht2_Unternehmen_parentsatwork_November-2020_LR_GAW-1.pdf

For Croatia:

<https://parentsatwork.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Izvjjes%CC%8Ctaj-stavovi-poslodavaca-studenti-2020.pdf>

We had opportunity to present our findings on few occasions and events

In Croatia, project is presented on the occasions of:

1. Mediterranean Women's Festival, online conference "Women's work in time of crises" organized by feminist association DOMINE from Split, Croatia, October 8th 2020
2. Local partnership for Employment of the City of Zagreb, Annual assembly and workshop for creating a Strategy for human resources development, September 23rd 2020 / November 9th 2020

In Austria, project is presented on the occasions of:

1. ABZ*CIRCLE ZOOM:IN „Back to the future instead of forward to the past“ organized by ABZ*AUSTRIA, November 19th 2020

Find us on social media!

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

Twitter: [ParentsWork1](#)

Instagram: [parentsatwork_euproject/](#)

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)

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