



New insights into (hidden) discrimination against mothers and fathers at work and in applying for jobs

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



Croatian research and findings

Views of employees (June 2019 – January 2020):

- 40 cases of discrimination were analysed (online questionnaires, telephone interviews, archive of Ombudswoman for Gender equality)
- 6 former clients from the Ombudswoman for Gender Equality
- 34 cases from a support group for parents

Views of employers (April – September 2020):

- total of 28 companies were surveyed through an online questionnaire (25) and qualitative interviews (3).
 - experiences during COVID – 19 pandemic
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Views of employees

Most often causes of discrimination:

1. pregnancy, pregnancy planning or temporary incapacity for work due to pregnancy, e.g.

"Giving a leadership position to a male person after the employer found out I'm pregnant, not sending me to a planned education for a license, telling me to "give birth to all the children I plan to at once."

2. use of the legal right to maternity and/or parental leave, e.g.

"When I returned from maternity leave to work - after ONLY 6 months - I was removed from my managerial position to which they hired another person - without explanation."

3. going on leave to take care of a child, e.g.

"My child ended up in the hospital, I took two days off. When I returned, my boss informed me that they would have to terminate my contract if I took sick leave again."

4. the very fact that they are parents and work-life balance, e.g.

"The employer told me: your child is big enough, why do you need to take care of him - you have to dedicate yourself to work."

Views of employees

Discrimination experienced:

1. termination of employment (or threat of), e.g.

"I got fired as soon as I told my boss I was pregnant."

2. demotion (financial and/or position) and denial of promotion and/or benefits, e.g.

"Suddenly you are removed from the list for a raise because you are taking maternity leave. When you return to work, you start from the bottom, as if you have just started working."

3. negative comments, harassment, mobbing and not understanding the needs of parents, e.g.

"As I have an administrative job, I often hear inappropriate comments from superiors about sick leave, pregnancy complications, etc., and on one occasion the supervisor openly commented at the meeting that he would rather "replace the entire hallway with men" (referring to the hallway where administrative offices are located and mostly women work) because he was informed about the pregnancy of two workers."

Views of employers

Employers's suggestions:

1. Internal procedures and documents with clear measures and possible forms of work for parents, but not at the expense of other workers;
 2. Supportive work environment and trust of colleagues, mainly persons in managerial positions in the company;
 3. Contracts of indefinite duration, especially for women;
 4. Flexible work schedule and working hours. Existence of a kindergarten or similar facility in the company to which parents can bring their children during working hours;
 5. Implement a policy of non-discrimination, especially of mothers, which is reflected in salaries and promotions;
 6. Solidarity and understanding of colleagues in difficult times like the Coronavirus crisis.
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COVID – 19 context:

Employers recognized the overburdening of parents with younger children. They point out that the difficulties were mostly related to:

- time management and work organization, stress, technical equipment and insufficiently clear management instructions.

Of the opportunities offered during the Coronavirus crisis to support parents, most employers provided:

- work from home and flexible working hours.

Working from home was a novelty for most employers:

- more hours than before and workers who didn't have this possibility before
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Conclusions

- gender stereotypes regarding paid and unpaid work
 - underreporting of discrimination
 - lack of information about rights, distrust in the legal system and institutions, and fear of dismissal or mobbing.
 - no policies or procedures on employer level for protection against discrimination
 - develop tools for employers for betterment of work - life balance
 - promote the work of Ombudswoman for Gender Equality office
 - stimulate fathers to use the right to paternity and parental leave
 - changes in legal framework
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