

Conference “How Generations and Gender Shape Demographic Change”

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Walking the tightrope of career and family

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

I would like to take this opportunity to address this panel session on walking the tightrope of career and family.

Changing social realities and demographic changes are posing a challenge for labour and social policies. In order to use all productive potential of the European labour market, it is necessary to ensure that women and men could participate equally and fully in the labour market and contribute to the society. To achieve this it is the most important to ensure opportunities for both women and men to reconcile professional and private life.

Equal partnership of women and men at work, and family life in particular, provides opportunities for women to participate more effectively and actively in the labour market. This issue is directly linked to the implementation of the Lisbon strategy goals, demographic changes and is extremely relevant for Lithuania.

Reconciliation of family and work commitments is one of the most important gender equality priorities in Lithuania, laid down in the National programme on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men. Main policy areas of our work towards reconciliation are as follows:

- promotion of flexible working arrangements for both women and men,
- increasing accessibility and quality of child care services,
- improvement of care services for dependant family members (elderly or disabled persons),

- encouragement of men to take up family responsibilities, in particular through incentives to take parental and paternity leaves and to share leave entitlements with women,
- combating gender-based stereotypes.

I would like to take pleasure in saying that implementation of measures of the National Programme has already provided some positive results. Women's average employment rate since 2006 increased from 61 to almost 63 percent in 2007. According to the EU report on gender equality, 2008, Lithuania takes the second best result in the EU in terms of average employment rate of women raising children up to 12 years. Number of women managers has increased and now exceeds 40 percent.

We are currently elaborating the model of family friendly workplace. It aims to promote family-friendly work places providing necessary support to employees who need to reconcile family and work obligations. The framework of the model has already been tested in one of the Lithuanian Universities. This model is to be widely presented to the social partners, both to the biggest trade unions and the biggest companies. The employers will be able to choose entire model or just several elements, like flexible child care services for the small children of employees, flexible working arrangements, or any other depending on the real needs. Projects aimed at establishment of family friendly workplaces would be supported by the European Social Fund.

If we look at the data of recent surveys, home, family duties still mostly remain on women's shoulders. Therefore, we see further promotion of a fairer share of families responsibilities at home as a very important issue. Active involvement of men in family life and childcare offers more opportunities for women to play a more active role in the labour market. Moreover, it reduces the gap between men and women in terms of their economic situation and ensures equal economic independence. On the other hand, while focused on family, men have an opportunity to switch their attention to a more relaxed environment. The most recent studies carried out in Lithuania in 2007¹ as well as studies

¹ (Reconciliation of rights, opportunities and duties of family and work for women and men. Socio-cultural analysis, 2007; Reasons of the gap in average life expectancy of women and men, 2007)

of other EU member states show that active participation in family life gives positive influence to men's life expectancy.

In this context I am glad to say that since the 1st of July 2006, Lithuanian men are entitled to fully paid one-month length paternity leave to be taken upon the birth of their child. We have noticed that fathers are particularly willing to use this opportunity. In 2007, almost 10 thousand fathers (approximately 30 %) used the right to take paternity leave. In Lithuania maternity leave is fully paid in the first year after child's birth and by 85% in the second year.

Having said that, I have to acknowledge that traditional stereotypical attitude towards the role of a man and a woman is slow to change. Society still tends to make a clear distinction between traditionally male and female occupations in family and professions at work. It leads to deep segregation of the labour market – both female and male dominated economic sectors, female and male dominated professions. It is particularly difficult to change stereotypical attitudes of women, men and the society with regard to the role of the man. Women appear to be more flexible in adapting to changes and they find it easier to choose work that was traditionally regarded as men's job. The measures targeted at male integration into traditionally female economic sectors and female professions, especially changing men's habits towards family duties appear to be less successful. Therefore, awareness raising activities targeted at the whole society are no less important.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me to conclude, noting that in our rapidly changing societies, particularly in the context of globalisation, the question of reconciliation of work and family life, has a new sense and becomes even more relevant. Our attention to this subject today, in this meeting makes importance of that issue obvious.

Thank you!