

# **Joint Informal Meeting of the Ministers for Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministers for Gender Equality**

**17 July 2015**

**European Convention Center  
Luxembourg**

**Changes on the labour market:  
a challenge for women and men**

**Background Note**



The objective of reaching 75% employment rate by 2020, cannot be achieved without an increased female participation in the labour market<sup>1</sup>. The different types and levels of female participation in the labour market are closely linked to the family care responsibilities. A male contribution in the private sphere is necessary to promote female employment.

Equal opportunity policy based on the specific needs of men and women, takes into account that men can also be discriminated against and may suffer from inequalities that are founded on stereotypical distribution of roles within our society. These embedded stereotypes make it difficult to challenge gender roles, particularly in the context of reconciliation between private and professional life. This is especially true for men, who wish to have more flexibility to reconcile private and professional life.

This challenge however, collides on the one hand with the traditional role assigned to men by society as “bread earners” for the family. On the other hand, the corporate culture has not sufficiently evolved to grant men the same flexibility as women are given. Men are not always willing to devote more time to their private life as they are afraid that reducing working hours could have negative consequences for their professional life. The lack of childcare facilities remains an equally important problem.

However, the political will expressed on the European level to increase the female employment rate and expand the representation of women in decision-making, both in the economy and in politics, the roles and responsibilities of men need to change, both in the professional and private domain.

Against this background, the European Union promotes a combination of measures to promote the reconciliation between professional and private life. Affordable childcare services are central in this context.

These measures have to be backed up by an efficient family leave, flexible working hours and organisations for women and men alike as well as fair taxation systems and social benefits that render efforts to make work pay equitable for both partners.

This combination of measures need to be complemented along the life cycle and take the needs of children but also adult dependents into account. It is essential that men use this set of measures. A more systematic use of family leave and/or flexible working arrangements by the fathers will make parenthood gender neutral in the eyes of the employer.

The objective to achieve gender equality in the workplace would be reached. Women’s skills would be utilised better with their full participation on the labour market.

A new distribution of responsibilities between men and women, in both the private and professional life, is an occasion to expand the matter of equality beyond the only perspective of the promotion of

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<sup>1</sup> In 2014 in Europe, the male employment rate was at 75,0 %, whilst the female one was at 63.5%

women's rights. For this reason, it is very important that gender policy be considered from the male perspective on the European level.

In addition to this trend observed among men wanting to spend more time in their private lives, the policy of equality between women and men as advocated at EU level today, has the main theme of greater participation of women on the labour market and particularly in economic and political decision-making.

The subject is so multifaceted and demands answers from the political side (labour and employment, social security, equal opportunities, finances) to create conditions for a better balance between work and private life for both women and men. We need to encourage parallel changes in mentality in within the corporate culture of companies, particularly toward to their male employees who wish to devote more time to their private life. Finally, the society must evolve by abandoning stereotypes and open up to new ways of living.

### **Questions for the debate:**

In this context, a number of questions arise:

- What instruments are already implemented or planned to accelerate the redistribution of the traditional roles of women and men? What were the remaining obstacles to such a change?
- What was the most important step, in your country, to encourage fathers to take family leave and / or to adopt flexible working schedules or other flexible work arrangements?
- How can governments stimulate changes in corporate cultures in companies to promote new models of work organisation not only for women but also for men? Can you share examples of good practices from your country?



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