



Building family-supportive workplaces

The role of Equality Bodies in tackling labour market discrimination of parents and carers

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What are National Equality Bodies?

- Equality Bodies are national, public institutions set up across Europe to promote equality and tackle discrimination on one, some, or all of the grounds of discrimination covered by European Union (EU) law – **gender, race and ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and disability.**
- They play a fundamental role in the non-discrimination architecture of the EU.



Equinet, the European Network of Equality Bodies

Equinet is a membership organisation bringing together **47 Equality Bodies from across Europe** (27 EU MS plus non-EU countries) that promotes equality in Europe by supporting and enabling the work of National Equality Bodies.



Equinet's engagement on the topic

- 2013 perspective "Equality Bodies promoting a better Work-Life Balance for all".
- 2015 seminar on Work-Life Balance and Parenthood Related Discrimination.
- Part of the 2019 EU Work-Life Balance package through a **seminar on dismissal protection** with the EC.
- 2023 seminar on the **EU Work-Life Balance Directive**, in the framework of the **EU Care Strategy package** and focused on the implementation and impact of the Directive.



Equality Bodies and Work-Life Balance

Equality Bodies have a fundamental role to play in the protection of working parents and carers from discrimination in the workplace.

- Article 15 of the **EU Work-Life Balance Directive** (2019/1158) provides National Equality Bodies designated, pursuant to Article 20 of the Gender Recast Directive (2006/54/EC), for the promotion, analysis, monitoring and support of equal treatment of all persons without discrimination on grounds of sex, are competent with regard to discrimination falling within the scope of the new Directive.
- Recital 45 further provides National Equality Bodies with tasks including providing independent assistance to victims of discrimination in pursuing their complaints. **Complaints handling**, among others, is indeed a crucial task undertaken by Equality Bodies.

Examples of Equality Bodies' work

- Equality Bodies' role includes, among others, investigating and addressing cases of **discrimination experienced by individuals in the context of pregnancy, parental leave, and care for relatives.**
- A research study by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA) involved researchers elaborating an online survey aimed to analyse experiences in different phases, e.g. before birth or announcement of pregnancy, during parental leave, after the resumption of professional activity, and during the care of relatives.
- Results show that:
 - 1) During pregnancy, **56% of parents experience discrimination** at least once. In this face, significantly more mothers (72%) than fathers (44%) are affected.
 - 2) In the context of parental leave, 52% of parents have experienced discrimination, with stronger effects for men when the leave is announced and for women during the period of leave.
 - 3) **48% of caregivers experience prejudice and discrimination** at least once.

Overall, discrimination against parents and caregivers in the workplace is **widespread**.

It is however clear that **women are still predominantly affected**.



***Parents@Work*: EU-funded 2-year project (2019-2021) carried out by four National Equality Bodies (Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, Portugal)**

- Objectives: **improving the protection of and combating discrimination** against pregnant workers, mothers, and fathers in the workplace, by collecting good practices regarding work-life balance and the protection of parents and carers.
- One of the outcomes of the project was providing Equality Bodies with a **user-friendly guide containing over 40 good practices collected in three different countries** (Belgium, Portugal, and Estonia) that identify areas of challenge of the work-life balance legislation in need to be addressed in efficient ways.

Equality Bodies, alongside all organizations striving for equitable work-life balance and non-discriminatory family policies, play a key role in the promotion of

(gender) equality in the workplace

and in the safeguard of one's right to a

mentally healthy working environment.



Cooperating with Trade Unions and Labour Inspectorates

- Trade Unions also play an important role in implementing family/care policies at the company level and supporting workers' rights, with the aim of ensuring family-friendly workplaces, and may be involved in **training activities** alongside Equality Bodies.
- Labour Inspectorates can complement the anti-discrimination expertise of Equality Bodies with more capacity and investigative powers, and together they can deliver a more complete response to the discrimination of workers (**knowledge and investigation powers sharing**).

Equality Bodies' Good Practice 1



Raising awareness on work-life balance and discrimination of working parents and carers

- Providing **information to rights-holders and employers** is an essential part of the Equality Bodies' work towards ensuring equality in the workplace.
- These **communication and awareness-raising initiatives** can be carried out with the collaboration of Trade Unions, Labour Inspectorates, CSOs or National Ministries, among others.

Equality Bodies' Good Practice 2



Engaging with employers to facilitate the implementation of work-life balance measures

- Equality Bodies can support the drafting of **equality plans** in companies, which do not guarantee the elimination of discrimination *per se*, but can rather address stereotypes.
- Equality Bodies can prove to employers that **guaranteeing a good work-life balance is a win-win** for both employees and companies.
- Equality Bodies can share with employers good practices implemented in other companies that proved successful and impactful. This allows **mutual learning** of employers.

Equality Bodies' Good Practice 3



Ways forward to effectively protect parents and carers?

1. Demand a full, satisfactory transposition of the Directive in all Member States
2. Ensure that work-life balance measures can be taken up by all, and in adequate forms
3. Prioritize the well-being and mental health of workers
4. Adopt an intersectional approach
5. Invest in care services
6. Raise awareness: information is key
7. Deconstruct gender roles and implement gender-transformative policies





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