

“Analysis of benefits and obstacles when introducing work-family balance measures into collective bargaining – trade-unions’ view”

Introduction

Successful reconciliation of work and family life for women and men has in recent years become extremely important, due to a change in patterns and requirements on the labour market on one hand and family structure on the other. Workers are faced with long and irregular working hours and demands for constant availability, while at the same time the shifts in family dynamics are present as well. Women are often not willing to give up their careers due to family obligations, while men want to be more involved in the upbringing of their children. The position of women and men in the labour market and in employment has a decisive impact on the position of women and men in family and in other areas of life. Gender roles and stereotypes influence the existing division of labour between men and women in the labour market, in family life and in society.

The role of social partners in the promotion of equal opportunities of women and men in the labour market is crucial. With the incorporation of measures for easier reconciliation of work and family obligations into the collective agreements, the social partners could contribute a lot to the progressive reduction of gender inequalities. As their coverage is high, collective agreements are one of the fundamental instruments for employment relationship regulation in Slovenia.

Methodological Issues

With the survey, the opinion of the trade union representatives who take part in collective bargaining process was obtained; that is whether and to what extent the measures for better reconciliation should be incorporated into the collective bargaining process and into the collective agreements. We also obtained the opinion about measures seen as the most and the least important, at what level of collective bargaining process these measures should be regulated and defined, which are the main benefits of the introduction of these measures in collective agreements, and what are the main obstacles or the reasons that these measures are not included to an even greater extent.

The analysis is based on the data gained with the quantitative research conducted in April 2015. When setting a questionnaire a web tool 1KA was used. The link to the questionnaire was sent to the trade union representatives who negotiate collective agreements on sectoral, company or at national levels. Therefore, the questionnaire was sent to Presidents and General Secretaries of sectoral trade unions (23 sectoral trade unions constitute ZSSS), to advisors on regional level and to advisors in ZSSS. Sectoral trade union representatives and regional representatives were asked to forward the questionnaire to all trade union representatives at company level who cooperate in collective bargaining process and have the impact on topics included in the

collective agreements. We used the so called snowball sampling. Due to our organisational structure on regional levels the trade union representatives from all Slovenian regions were included, as well as the negotiators for the majority of collective agreements.

Sample

In total, 77 respondents answered the questionnaire. 90 % of all, that is 69 respondents, fully completed the survey. Only fully completed questionnaires were included in the analysis. The questionnaire was answered by 49 % of women and 51 % of men, so our sample is gender-balanced. The largest share of the respondents was aged from 46 to 64 years (57 % of the total), followed by the group aged from 36 to 45 years (29 %), by far the lowest share of respondents was in age group 65+, namely 1 %. Among the respondents there was no-one from the age group up to 24 years of age. According to the educational structure, the largest share of respondents is highly educated (67%), followed by those with upper secondary education (33%). There were no respondents with only basic education. Among the ones who answered the questionnaire there were 48 % of labour confidants in companies, 19 % of sectoral trade union leaders, 16 % of trade union leaders or advisors at the region level, 12 % of external trade union leaders or advisors (ZSSS), and 6% of respondents, who could not be included into any of the above mentioned categories.

Key Findings

The majority of the trade union representatives (i.e. 93 % of all) believe that measures for better reconciliation of professional and family obligations are very important, or even the most important for regulating employment relationships. Therefore, we can conclude that this issue is relevant and suitable for inclusion into collective agreements. In addition, the vast majority (i.e. 93 %) think that the measures for reconciliation of professional and family life should be linked at all levels: at national, sectoral and corporate level. We can conclude that the trade union representatives share the opinion that for the successful governance of reconciliation of work and family life interrelated actions and interrelated measures are needed; and these should be agreed on different levels of social dialogue.

The most important measures for easier reconciliation of professional and family obligations in practice, as defined by the trade union representatives, are:

1. Extra leave for easier adjustment when a child goes to school or kindergarten for the first time.
2. Flexible organisation of working time, taking into account the needs and aspirations of the workers with family responsibilities.
3. Limiting the posting of a worker with family responsibilities to work in another place.

One of the reasons for such a result could be the fact that these measures are common and well-known as many companies as well as state enterprises use them in practice (these measures are defined in collective agreements at the enterprise level or in internal acts). These measures also do not require a larger financial stake and are easily accessible to an organisation or company.

Lesser importance was given to the measures of reconciliation which contribute directly to the improvement of gender equality and to the measures supporting a more balanced division of family work between spouses. Among these are i) special measures aimed at women in leading, managerial positions, ii) promotion of equal use of parental rights for both parents and iii) special measures aimed at fathers.

Less important in practice are the following measures: i) the provision of additional paid leave due to family obligations, ii) support of child care by the employers (the kindergarten in companies, vacation care, care at home, at night, co-financing etc.) and iii) work at home on the proposal of the worker. The reason for such an opinion could lie in the fact that Slovenia has - in comparison to other countries - a relatively well-developed network of public institutions for pre-school education. The trade union representatives also believe that these measures could entail too great costs for the companies and that the nature and organisation of the work often do not allow the implementation of these measures in practice.

The analysis has also shown that a larger importance to measures for easier reconciliation of professional and family obligations was given by women, by younger respondents aged from 24 to 35 years, by the respondents from the public sector and by those who negotiate only on the level of the company.

The analysis has also revealed that the vast majority of trade union representatives believe that the measures for easier reconciliation of professional and family life have positive effects on workers and on employers (91 % of representatives agreed). 90% or more believe that the introduction of these measures in collective agreements **has strong or very strong positive effects** because they: i) increase satisfaction of employees, ii) strengthen the confidence of workers in the employer, iii) reduce the stress of workers and iv) increase workers' productivity. The positive effects of the introduction of these measures in collective agreements are in greater extent recognized by women respondents, respondents who come from the public sector, and those with completed higher level of education.

Trade union representatives also shared the opinion that **the largest barrier** for integration of measures for easier reconciliation of work and family obligations into collective agreements are:

1. Employers' awareness which is not sufficient in this field, and
2. employers' desire to freely arrange these questions (use of non-formal measures, soft rules, etc.).

This opinion is shared by two thirds of the trade union representatives. Key for the improvement in this area is therefore awareness rising of the employers and the employees, as well as the encouragement of social partners to participate in search for common solutions.

Conclusion

The social partners have already incorporated a variety of measures and good practices for reconciliation of work and family life into the collective agreements. However, the theme leaves much room for improvement and introduction of new approaches and new measures. New measures should be designed in a way to promote equal opportunities for women and men in

the labour market, to break the glass ceiling, to promote active fatherhood and decrease the gender pay gap. Measures should suit the individual needs of women and men in different cycles of life. Furthermore, the measures in collective agreements should not be designed only for women, but should encourage even distribution of parental obligations and employment opportunities for both genders, since the reduction of existing inequalities in the labour market brings benefits to men, women, families, employers and in the end to the society as a whole.

The Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia (ZSSS)

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