

Men in care

WORKPLACE SUPPORT FOR CARING MASCULINITIES

Men in Care: Workplace Support for Caring Masculinities.

Country report.

Poland



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ABOUT MiC PROJECT

Men in Care is a European 3-year project (March 2019-Feb 2022) of 12 national organizations (universities, social partners and NGOs) co-funded by the European Commission under the EaSI program (PROGRESS axis). Men in Care (MiC) aims to improve workplace conditions to promote men taking caring roles in seven countries (Austria, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Slovenia and Spain). MiC will assess how policies and workplace cultures can change to enable men to become more active in caring for children, elderly, partners, co-workers and friends. MiC partners are: National Distance Education University (project coordinator, Spain), Fundación 1 de Mayo (Spain), Verein für Männer- und Geschlechterthemen Steiermark (Austria), European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (Germany), University of Iceland, REFORM (Resources Centre for Men, Norway), Jagiellonian University (Poland), PLinEU (Poland), Diversity Hub (Poland), The Peace Institute (Slovenia), the Association of Employers of Slovenia and the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia.

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1.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

This report¹ presents the findings based on the quantitative analysis of gender equality and caring masculinity in Poland. It is a part of the project *Men in Care. Workplace support for caring masculinities* (MiC) carried out in seven European countries: Spain, Germany, Austria, Poland, Slovenia, Norway and Iceland. The project involves workers, trade unions, employers and families to identify and share best practices for work-family life balance. More specifically, the project aims at improving workplace conditions by reducing barriers preventing men from becoming involved in caring activities. This aim will be achieved through the assessment of gender inequalities in the context of paid and unpaid work, organizational analysis of policies and workplace experiences, in-house seminars at workplaces and trainings for managers, male employees and workers' representatives.

Poland struggles with the consequences of neoliberal reforms initiated in the 1990s. The transition from command economy to market economy was based on the so-called Washington consensus which emphasised the importance of liberalization, privatization and sustaining financial discipline and created a new context for welfare policies and gender equality (Czerwińska, Piotrowska, 2009; Kowalska, Migalska, Warat, 2014; Płeć a możliwości ekonomiczne w Polsce, 2004). The state's withdrawal from responsibility for the economic security and the cuts in public expenditure (especially on education, health and care) has threatened the funding of welfare state and made the individuals (especially women) bear the brunt of the neoliberal approach. These reforms initiated the process of re-familisation and led the welfare policies in the direction of implicit familism or implicit genderisation (Saxonberg, 2014; Saxonberg, Szelewa, 2007; Szelewa, Polakowski, 2008). Within this model, the insufficient state's investment in public social services and limited state's support for caring roles are intertwined with a lack of recognition of reproductive work. As a result, this model promotes the traditional family model in which the family – but in practice a woman – is considered to be the primary care provider. The recent right-wing turn has brought about reforms in family policies in the direction of explicit familism (Szelewa, 2017) or explicit genderisation (Saxonberg, 2013, 2014). This new policy is based mostly on the increase in financial family support (cash benefit offered within a programme

¹ Data and analysis included in national reports will be updated when post-covid19 data are available.

"Family 500+") which is neither accompanied by the development of care services nor the recognition of unpaid domestic and reproductive work. Consequently, this model does not challenge gender inequalities in care and work and reproduces the model in which a woman is mainly responsible for care and domestic work (in addition to her engagement in the labour market) and a man is seen through this breadwinner and a secondary caregiver role.

A persistent gender inequality in Poland and huge differences between Poland and the EU are reflected in Poland's scores in the Gender Equality Index: "With 55.2 out of 100 points, Poland ranks 24th in the EU on the Gender Equality Index. Its score is 12.2 points lower than the EU average. Between 2005 and 2017, Poland's core increased by only 2.8 points. Compared to 2015, its score decreased by 1.6 points. Poland is progressing towards gender equality at a slower pace than other Member States. Its ranking has dropped four places since 2005 and six since 2015" (Gender Equality Index 2019: Poland, 2019). The most considerable gender inequalities are in the domain of time while the progress have been observed in the domain of work and money.

This report examines the trends in gender equality in the area of work, care and work-life balance in Poland. It is primarily based on the quantitative data from the European Labour Force Survey (LFS), but it also refers to other international (such as Gender Equality Index 2019) and national (including Gender Equality and Quality of Life [GEQ 2015] and Central Statistic Office) studies. It shows that gender inequalities are significant in the labour market. The employment rate is higher among men and the gender gap is even higher among couples with young children. The gender pay gap has decreased but women still earn less than men and lower pension for retired women remains an issue. Both the employment rate and the salary depend on the education of employees, resulting in the most unfavourable situation of female employees with low level of education. Policy measures such as part-time work are not used either by men or women which may be connected to a fact of financial loss and limited popularity of such solutions. Moreover, there is still horizontal and vertical segregation: fewer women than men work in the higher positions and women outnumber men in particular sectors of the labour market such as education, social work or health. The inequalities are also visible in care: the uptake of childcare leave is lower among men and they are less likely to perform household work.

1.2. GENDER GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT

Employment rate for both genders increased between 2007 and 2017 and this tendency can be observed regardless of the family situation. Yet, while the employment rate for childless women and men aged 25-49 was similar (with decreasing inverse gap between 2007 and 2017 from -3 to -1), the gender gap in employment was high among fathers and mothers, with more profound impact on a situation of women (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The lowest employment rate was among mothers whose child is between 1 and 2 years old (46% in 2007 and 53% in 2017) and increased to reach the level of 63% in 2007 and 69% in 2017 for women with children aged 6-12. A reverse tendency was observed among men: the lowest employment rate was among childless men and increased in fathers, with a maximum of 91% in 2017 when a child was below the age of 1 and minimum 88% when a child was between 6 and 12 years old. The "motherhood penalty" was observed as motherhood contributed to the gender inequality among parents, which was further confirmed by a significant gap in the employment of childless women (83% in 2017) and those having a child (on average 62%). Therefore, the gender gap in employment persisted and remains stable between 2007 and 2017, with the highest rate among women and men with young children (aged 0 and 1-2), decreased for those with older children and was inverse for women and men without children. Such tendency has been observed in other studies. For example, data presented in *Barcelona objectives* (2013: 23, Table 1) revealed that the highest employment rate was among men with children aged 0-12 (90,2) and the lowest among women with children aged 0-12 (67,5%) while GEQ 2015 showed that fathers work in a higher proportion than childless men (68% compared to 62% of men without children) while a reversed trend was among women: 50% of childless women were employed while 47% of mothers worked (Warat, Kowalska, 2018). These differences may relate to the cultural expectation supporting the model of male breadwinner and female caretaker. It may also show insufficiency of care facilities such as crèches and kindergartens as the employment rate is the lowest when children are in their preschool years.

Education has a significant impact on a labour market situation. Previous research has shown (cf. Lisowska, 2009; Sarata, 2011; Warat, Kowalska, 2018) that people with a higher educational attainment are more likely to have a job and this tendency is also observed among parents (Figure 3). In 2017, there was a wide gap between fathers with lower secondary and tertiary education of 32pp in case of fathers of children aged 0 and 38pp if children were 1-2 years old. This gap was much larger for mothers (respectively 67pp and 52pp). The data shows that participation in the labour market was influenced by the

intersection of education and gender, making women with secondary level educational attainment the most vulnerable and affected. Their employment rate was five times lower in case of mothers with a child aged 0 than their male counterpart and three times in case of mothers with children aged 1-2. This can be explained by several factors. First, the scope of jobs available to men with lower educational attainment is broader than for women with the same level of education. Secondly, jobs performed by women with lower education are often located in the peripheral sectors of economy. Finally, taking into account the low salaries, new social benefits available to parents and insufficient number of nurseries and kindergartens, it might be a financial-based strategy and a trade-off between low salary and high costs of care for women to focus on care work instead of making an effort to reconcile childcare and paid work.

Men tended to work more paid hours than women (respectively on average 42 hours and 38 hours; Gender Equality Index 2019: Poland, 2019) but they also tried to decrease their working time. This tendency is also observed among parents. Average weekly work hours of mothers (36,7 hours) were always below average weekly work hours of fathers (41,7 hours). Importantly, while the average weekly work hours for mothers in 2007 and 2017 was almost the same, fathers (regardless of the age of a child) worked on average 2 hours less in 2017 than in 2007. More men than women also claimed that they would like to work less hours per week that they currently do (respectively 26% and 20%, EWCS 2015). This may indicate a slow change among men for whom work is no longer the only source of identity (cf. Kimmel, 2006; Vandello, 2015).

There is a high gender gap in the inactivity rates of people aged 25-49. Inactivity rate of men was more than 2 times lower in 2007 and 3 times lower in 2017 than women's, regardless of their educational attainments (Figure 4). The widening of the gap was caused by the decrease of inactivity rate for men (from 9,5% to 7,5%) while in case of women, the inactivity rate had not changed and amounted to 21%. The inactivity rate strongly depends on the educational attainments of both genders. For men, the inactivity gap between men with lower secondary education or less and those who completed the third level education increased from 20,3pp in 2007 to 25,7pp. Importantly, for men who completed at least upper secondary school the inactivity rate was not only much lower, but also dropped between 2007 and 2017. For women, the inactivity rate increased regardless of educational attainments yet the highest inactivity rate was among women with lower secondary education or less (54,2% in 2017). The unemployment rate varied due to age and was the highest among young women aged 25-34 which coincides with the time for family formation and increased care responsibilities for children (Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 45) and remained higher for women till 44 years old which strongly indicates a relation between family situation and opportunities at the labour market. Caring for family remained one of the most important reasons forcing women to withdraw from the labour market or limit their participation (as indicated by 16% of all inactive women in a fourth part of a year 2010), while only 3% of men who are inactive mentioned this motivation (Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 56-57). Therefore, there is considerable gender inequality in employees' inactivity for family reasons. More women than men declared that they did not work due to taking care of their family in 2007 and 2017 and the gap increased over this period by 1,2pp (Figure 5). The differences were significant: from all men aged 25

to 64 years, only 0,4% remained inactive due to this reason while 7% from all women aged 25 to 64 years old indicated this reason in 2017. Such situation occurred more often between women and men with secondary education or lower than in case of women and men with higher educational attainments.

There is still significant gender inequality in financial resources in Poland. The adjusted gender pay gap was around 18% (Gender Equality Index: Poland 2019, 2020: 2) but according to latest data published by Eurostat, Poland has an unadjusted gender pay gap of 7.2% (the fifth lowest in the EU). The Gender Equality Index: Poland 2019 (2020: 2) report pointed out that “[d]espite increases in mean monthly earning of both women (+64%) and men (+61%) from 2006 to 2014, women still earn 18% less than men per month. In couples with children, women earn around 28% less than men (25% less in couples without children)”. The gender pay gap changed over the life-course. While it increased in the younger age group, reaching 12pp among those aged 35 to 44 years, it dropped for people aged 45 years and more. For men and women over 65, there was an inverse gender pay gap (-13,7). Further distinctions in women’s and men’s earnings were due to educational and occupational differences and were affected by position held in a company (Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 36-39), leading not only to a pay gap between women and men, but also within each of these groups. For example, the intersection of gender and educational level shows that the lowest earnings were received by women with the lowest educational level. The differences between women’s and men’s earnings were also higher in masculinized occupations as well as salaries were in general lower in feminised occupations. Finally, gender pay gap was the widest among people with the top salaries although it existed among those with the lowest salaries as well (Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 41-42). These findings point to the accumulating impact of gender, age and social class.

There are also visible differences between male and female’s pensions. The gender pension gap exists in this area as well and in 2012 increased from 23% (for people aged 75 and over) to 28% (for people aged 65 to 69), causing higher at-risk-of-poverty rates among women than men (EIGE, 2019: 39). This is a result of lower women’s earnings and shorter period of contribution, mostly due to interruptions in their employment careers and lower statutory retirement age of 60 years old for women (compared to 65 years old for men). The remaining life expectance at the time of retirement further contributes to the gender pay gap as the earlier retirement of women and longer life expectancy of women reduces female pensions.

1.3. ARRANGEMENTS TO COPE WITH WORK-LIFE BALANCE ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

The gender equality in the labour market depends not only on the participation of men and women or their salaries, but also on the working patterns, including opportunities to transition between part-time and full-time work, flexibility in working hours and remote work. These flexible working arrangements are barely available in Poland: 61% of women and 55% of men are not able to use them as they are set by the employer (Gender Equality Index 2019: Poland, 2019: 5). In addition to gender gap in accessing these solutions, their availability depends also on the sector. "The gender gap is wider among public sector employees, who, in general, are less likely to work on flexible hours than private sector employees. In the Polish public sector, employees have little control over their working time: 72 % of women and 74 % of men state that they have no possibility of changing their working-time arrangements, compared to 65 % of women and 62 % of men public sector employees in the EU overall. The situation is a little better for private sector employees, but rates are still high. Among private sector employees, 57 % of women and 54 % of men have no control over their working time" (Gender Equality Index 2019: Poland, 2019: 6).

To support men and women while entering the labour market, moving to full-time job and achieving work-life balance, flexible working time arrangements have been implemented. Yet, in Poland, these solutions prevailed in private sector and were easier accessible for men (EIGE, 2019: 104). In the public sector, a roughly similar number of men and women had a flexibility to set their own working-time arrangements (EIGE, 2019: 104).

Part-time employment is not popular in Poland and it was utilized only to limited extent by women, especially from younger cohort: 1,6% of employed women aged 25-49 in 2007 and 2017 while the share of women aged 50-64 decreased from 0,4 to 0,2 over this period. Part-time work was not utilized by men at all in 2007 and only 0.1% of all working men decided to use this measure in 2017. Despite the fact that take-up of part-time work was higher for women, the transition rate for women and men into full time jobs were similar.

Although part-time employment is seen as a measure allowing to combine work and care duties by reducing working time and adjusting the salary according to the actual working time, data provided by Central Statistic Office showed that caring for children or a person with disability is less and less often indicated as a primary reason for choosing this type of employment (Statistics Poland, 2011 quoted in Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 56). While this motivation was indicated by 86.000 women in a fourth quarter of 2010 and was the third (out of five) often mentioned reason, only 5.000 men decided to work part-time

due to performing care duties and it was the least important reason for them (Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, 2016: 56).

1.4. GENDER GAPS IN CARE AND DOMESTIC WORK

In Poland, gender gap in household and family care participation exists and is related to the unequal distribution of time spent on domestic and care work and the type of unpaid work performed by both genders. The gender inequalities in domestic and care work remains relatively stable as domestic and care work are considered a women's responsibility and as a result – women are still more engaged in them. In 2010, they spent twice more time a day than men on household and caring activities (Figure 6). As a result, they experienced "double burden": their participation in paid work increased but their presence in the labour market did not alter their engagement in unpaid care and housework. This tendency was observed among all age groups but affected women and men differently. As data shows, the older the woman was, the time spent in domestic and family care work decreased, and in opposition to this – the older the man was, the time spent increased (Figure 6). For instance, in 2010 men aged 45-64 spent about 20 minutes a day more than those aged 25 and 44 (2 hours 22 minutes, and 2 hours 39 minutes respectively). In contrast, younger women (25-44 years) spent almost 40 minutes more than women aged 45-64 (5 hours 10 minutes and 4 hours 26 minutes respectively). Moreover, data pointed out to a slow trend of lowering the difference between genders in participation rate in particular tasks regarding household and family care work (Figure 7). Yet, this was caused mostly by the lower engagement of women rather than the increased of men's participation. The existing studies suggest that this tendency can be explained by the growing popularity and accessibility of domestic appliances which have mechanized housework. However, it should be noted that these appliances may reduce time of women's routine housework, they fail to challenge the domestic division of labour stemming from the traditional model of family (Suwada 2017; Żadkowska 2010). The decrease in carrying out housework and care can be also explained by the use of services of domestic workers, mostly female migrants from Ukraine as well as the increase of usage of institutional care (such as pension houses, care institutions) (Kindler, Kordasiewicz, Szulecka, 2016).

Generally, women and men mainly participated in tasks culturally assigned to their gender. All chores except construction and repairs are more often done by women regardless of age group (25-44 and 45-64 years old) and family situation. Such a division of housework and care work along gender lines further reproduces gender stereotypes and sustains the male breadwinner model and female caretaker.

The unequal distribution of time exists when the care responsibilities are especially needed, i.e. in couples with children. It is still mostly a mother who carried out daily and routine caring tasks (as putting child to bed, daily childcare) and more sporadic ones (like taking care of ill child/ren). For example, 65% of respondents declared that it was a woman who stayed at home with ill child/ren, compared to 2% that indicated men as usually/always performing this task (Gender Equality..., 2016, cf. Ciaputa, Krzaklewska 2018). This is further confirmed by the analysis in the domain of work-life balance provided by EIGE (2019: 92) which pointed out that the gender gap in providing care services for children in Poland was 23 p.p.² and was one of the most visible in the EU³. "In Poland, 65% of all informal carers of children are women. Overall, 61% of women are involved in caring for or educating their children or grandchildren at least several times a week, compared to 47% of men. More women and somewhat fewer men are involved in caring for or educating their children or grandchildren in Poland than in the EU, where 56% of women and 50% of men are involved in caring for or educating their children or grandchildren. The gender gaps are wider among women and men aged 20-49 (90% and 69%), and among women and men who are not working (44% and 23%)" (Gender Equality Index 2019: Poland, 2019: 5).

The age of a child significantly determined time spent a day by genders on childcare. The older the child, the time spent by women and men on childcare significantly decreases. While in 2010 among couples with youngest child less than 6 years older women spent almost 7 hours a day working for household and caring for other members of a family and in couples with youngest child between 7 and 17 years old almost 5 hours a day, men spent respectively 3 hours and a bit more than 2 hours a day. A similar tendency is observed in activities related directly to childcare: while in 2010 among couples with youngest child less than 6 years old time spent by women on childcare except teaching, reading and talking with a child was more than 2 hours a day, comparing to 41 minutes a day of time spent by men, in couples with youngest child between 7 and 17 years old it was only 14 minutes and 5 minutes a day respectively. At the same time, we can observe a positive change between 2000 and 2010 among couples with youngest child below 6 years old there was 0,8pp raise of participation rate of men in household and family care duties in comparison to 2000, among couples with youngest child over 7 and under 17 years old data show reversed trend - a decrease in men's participation rate by 2.1pp (Figure 8 and Figure 9). The former can be seen as an indicator of slowly changing model of fatherhood and men's participation in household and family care. Moreover, although the share of men involved in housework and care duties is still low, we can observed an intergenerational change towards more equal division of unpaid household duties and responsibilities in Poland (Gender Equality..., 2016: 14; Slany, Ratecka, 2018). With each subsequent generation, the share of men involved in family life and domestic chores increased (Gender Equality..., 2016). While in family of origin of the surveyed respondents most of the organizational, order-making and childrearing work was performed by women, in respondent's family of procreation those duties were shared more often equally. For

² For working women and working men the gender gap in providing care services was 14 p.p. (EIGE 2019: 94).

³ A gender gap in providing care services for children was also visible among grandparents as more women than men care for their grandchildren (11 p.p) (EIGE, 2019: 93).

example, in respondents' family of origin 46% of parents equally took care of free time and leisure, while in their family of procreation - 66%.

Gender gap is also observed in informal care for older people and/or people with disabilities. Most of this work is carried out by women (73%)⁴ and the gender gap in care is wider among women and men aged 50-64 (28% and 14%) compared to 20-49 aged group (11% and 9%) (Gender Equality Index 2019: Poland, 2019: 5). While the level of participation of women in care work in Poland is the same as the EU average, men are less likely to perform care compared to the average involvement of men in care in the EU (4 p.p. lower). Moreover, care work has stronger impact on the situation in the labour market of women than men: 42% of men and 38% of women performing care for older people and/or people with disabilities are employed (Gender Equality Index 2019: Poland, 2019: 5).

Men are also less involved in providing informal help to other households. In the age group 45-64, men's participation rate was twice lower than women's one in 2010 (Figure 10, c.f. EIGE, 2019: 80-81). Moreover, in ten-year time the gender gap (i.e. the difference between the participation rate for men and women) in participation rate in informal help provided to other households has increased from -3,4% to -5,9%. At the same time, a general trend of lowering participation rate of both genders was observed: in 2000 14% of men and 17,4% of women provided help to other household while in 2010 – respectively 7,9% and 13,8%. It means that within ten years almost twice as many men as women lowered their provision of informal help provided to other households.

Yet, volunteering for individuals gained greater popularity than unpaid work for organizations and institutions. In 2015, 30,9% Poles choose this kind of unpaid work outside household. Among them, 28% declared working for friends and neighbours, 4% for strangers, and 4% for society, environment, and locality. Men slightly more often performed this kind of informal help than women (32,3%, compared to 29,6% of women) (Statistics Poland, 2017: 34-36).

⁴ This is the highest rate in all EU countries.

1.5. INCREASE OF MEN IN CARE

1.5.1. Men on leave

The legal regulations in Poland are mostly focused on providing work-family life balance measures for families. The policies are mostly framed as gender-neutral and therefore are directed mostly to both parents with two exception described below. To enable men to care for their children, the following policy measures were implemented (see also Factsheet on Poland):

- > maternity leave: 20 weeks, at least 14 reserved for a mother, a remaining part can be transferred to a partner/family member;
- > paternity leave: introduced in 2010, up to 2 weeks, only for a father and not transferable to a mother/family member;
- > parental leave: family entitlement, 34 weeks per family, granted to both parents (can be taken in turns or both parents can take it at the same time) and can be combined with part-time work. It can be split into max. four parts which last for a minimum 8 weeks. It can be taken until a child turns six years old;
- > unpaid childcare leave: up to 36 months, granted to both parents with the exception of one month which is reserved for each parent; might be divided into periods, can be taken in turns or by both parents at the same time. It can be taken until a child turns six years old;
- > adoption leave: parental allowance is paid if a child is below seven years old;
- > 2 paid days (or 16 hours) each year off for parents with at least 1 child at the age of up to 14 years.

All of the leaves, but childcare leave, are eligible only for insured workers, including employees and self-employed covered by social security insurance at the start of leave, and in case of childcare leave for workers with at least six month work record. Parental leave is not accessible only for unemployed and non-working parents. As a result, 27% of women and 10% of men aged 20-49 (potential parents) were illegible for parental leave (Gender Equality Index 2019, 2019: 4). Employed women and men can also take time off for the care of dependents (up to 60 days, until child turns 8 years old/14 years old if disabled, and up to 14 days for other family members) (Kurowska et al., 2018: 323-328).

Despite the wide range of opportunities for men to engage in childcare, data shows that while men's use of statutory paternity leave is rather high, only few of them use parental leave and parental benefits offered by the state. For instance, in 2015 more than 40 and in

2016 more than 38 men per 100 live births were recipients of publicly administrated paternity leave, and only 1,3 in 2015 and 1,1 in 2016 men per 100 children born used their parental leave, compared to 95,6 in 2015 and in 2016 102,4 women per 100 live births. This finding is further confirmed by data on maternity, paternity and parental leave benefits from companies employing no more than 20 employees collected by Social Insurance Institution (*Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych*) (Table 2) and other studies (c.f. Kurowska et al., 2018, Suwada, 2017). In 2016 and 2015 men constituted only 3% of recipients of all of those leaves. While women dominated in using maternity and parental leaves (97% of recipients), men took mostly statutory paternity leave (146,700 men in 2016 and 174,200 men in 2017, using on average 13.2 and 12.6 days of paternity leave respectively) (Kurowska et al., 2018: 328-330).

The Labour Force Survey indicated the same tendency: in 2017, 78% of employed women and only 0,6% of men with children aged 0 did not work during the reference week due to the maternity or parental leave. The exact data, however, are scarce and difficult to access as it is collected either by different institutions and therefore dispersed or in a specific reference week without taking into account a possibility of leave take-up in separate periods. There are several factors contributing to the lower share of men using paid parental leave. Firstly, this is a result of cultural barrier: social norms, attitudes and expectations towards men's and women's role as parents which put women in a role of carer and second-class worker (OECD, 2016: 13, Zasada równego traktowania, 2015: 27). Such traditional gender roles are seen particularly among men (OECD, 2016: 20), but GEQ 2015 shows that women also sustain such model. While more than 70% of GEQ 2015 survey participants believed that men can take care of their children as well as women can, almost three-fourth of respondents agreed that women who have small children should not be working (Gender Equality..., 2016: 15). The take-up of leave among men is also low due to insufficient social campaigns promoting these leaves and lack of state instrument to promote caring fatherhood contributes to the low uptake of leave by men. Equally important barriers are created by financial factors: gender pay gap and higher salaries for men create, inadequate financial compensation during leave and lack of incentives encouraging men to take the leave make these leaves financially unprofitable for men. Finally, the legal regulation sends also a clear message: mothers and father are not equal in qualifying for a leave to care for their children: men's leave to care for a child depends on the right of mother to take a leave and there is still unequal length of leaves for both genders (Zasada równego traktowania 2015: 27-32, Korsvik, Warat 2016: 209-210).

These barriers are reflected in GEQ 2015 study: in 70% of families, the leave for taking care of a newborn and small child was taken by a woman while in 28% of families none of the parents took it due to a fact that woman was not entitled to it. Only in 2% of families the maternity leave was used by both parents or solely by a father. Regarding the leave reserved for fathers, only 37% of surveyed men (61 fathers from 167 families) used this leave since 2010 (when 2-weeks non-transferable leave for fathers was implemented). The main reasons preventing men from taking the leave were lack of a right to take a leave and their unwillingness to have a break in professional career.

1.5.2. Men in care occupations

The feminization and masculinization of certain sectors of the labour is clearly visible in Poland. According to the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Statistics Poland 2009: 81-83, Statistics Poland 2018: 141) the most feminized sectors of national economy are "health and social work" and "education", where both - in 2007 and in 2017 - men constituted respectively about 18% and 21% of employees. In the latter, the higher the educational level, the bigger the men's share of teachers can be observed. For example, in 2016 men constituted about 2% teachers in early childhood education, 14% in primary, 30% in secondary, and 55% in tertiary education, being equal or a bit above OECD and EU countries averages (OECD, 2018: 405; see Jankowska 2008: 363). A similar situation is in case of social work where men constitute only about 6% of employees (Miś 2014: 111). Moreover, as indicated by Chamber of Nurses and Midwives in Poland (Naczelna Izba Pielęgniarek i Położnych, 2018) men constituted 1,77% of nurses in 2008 (4 756 out of 268 015) and 2,27% in 2018 (6707 out of 295 481), and their share as midwives was only 0,14% and 0,20% respectively. It is worth noting that men outnumbered women in managerial positions in the abovementioned feminized sectors (Fuszara, 2008a: 326). On the other hand, men outnumbered women in the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Men indicate various barriers preventing them from choosing occupations in feminised sectors. In their opinions, such occupations do not enjoy immense prestige (Kluczyńska 2017:63), offer low salaries which do not allow them to provide for their families, expose them to sarcastic comments or hostility from their friends regarding their choice of professional career (Fuszara 2008b: 343-344, Jankowska 2008:365). Other reasons pointed out by men include: lack of possibility to be promoted, insufficient knowledge about these occupations and stereotypes on male/female occupations and stereotypes regarding men in particular occupations (Fuszara 2008b: 355-356).

1.5.3. Self-care of men

Last available national data on health status of Polish population, issued by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Statistics Poland, 2014) indicate change in five-year time toward Poles' better subjective evaluation of health. While in 2009 approx. 34% and in 2014 approx. 33% of Poles evaluated it as "neither good, nor bad", "bad" or "very bad", it was men who were more likely to evaluate it as at least "good" – 71% of men compared to 64% of women (Statistics Poland, 2016: 58). The higher a person's level of education and the younger a person is, the higher is his/her health satisfaction (Gender Equality Index 2019: Poland, 2019: 3). Moreover, better evaluation of subjective health in Polish population by men goes hand in hand with their lower declaration rate of having long-term health problems or chronic diseases (47% men compared to 57% women). Yet, men more often than women suffered from heart attack, stroke and cirrhosis in 2014 (Statistics Poland, 2016: 63-65). This might be a result of their more frequent and increasing obesity (16,6% men and 15,2% women in 2009, and 18,1% and 15,6% respectively in 2014), less frequent daily consumption of fruits and vegetables (50% men and about 66% women in 2009, compared to 47% men and 52% women in 2014) (Statistics Poland, 2011: 55, 63; Statistics Poland, 2016: 77, 88), their physical

inactivity (55% men, compared to 62% of women in 2014) (Statistics Poland, 2016: 96) and their prevalence among smokers and people consuming alcohol (in 2014 they constituted 32,5% compared to 20,3% women smokers and 83% men compared to 63% of women alcohol consumers) (Statistics Poland, 2016: 98-100)⁵.

Men are slowly becoming more interested in their health, which is mirrored in their more frequent attendance to general practitioners meetings at least once a year over time - it was 67% men compared to 75% of women in 2009 and 74% men compared to 85% of women in 2014. Yet, the number of males who had their prostate examined remains low (1/3 of men in 2014) (Statistics Poland, 2016: 119).

1.5.4. Men caring for a community

Last available and detailed national data on unpaid work provided outside the household⁶ in Poland published by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Statistics Poland, 2017: 19) indicated that in 2015 more men (36,1%) than women (34%) were engaged in voluntary work⁷. Yet, an average time spent on unpaid work outside household per four weeks before survey was one hour shorter in case of men than of women (7 and 8 hours respectively). Moreover, men typically engaged in different types of work: they performed tasks classified as corresponding with "worker and craftperson" occupation, while women with "social and legal staff" occupation (Statistics Poland, 2017: 20). Men more often volunteered for associations and other social organizations (4,4% men, 3,6% women), labor unions, employees boards and bodies (especially in age group 45-54), political parties and housing associations, while women in church organizations, religious associations and organizations (constituting 2/3 of the volunteers) and local government organizations (Statistics Poland, 2017: 28-33).

Similar tendencies were indicated in GEQ 2015 on civic participation in Poland: all in all, less than 10% of Poles engaged in voluntary work in 2015 (Kowalska, Warat 2016). Taking into account this low general participation rate of Poles, it can be observed that men more often than women engaged in unpaid work for labour unions, for informal groups, hobby clubs or sport teams, while women for kindergartens and schools where respondent's children were enrolled, for charity initiatives, for parish, church and religious communities (Figure 11). It should be also stressed that men's highest engagement was observed in activities connected with childcare (in kindergartens and schools), which might be a sign of growing importance of father role in men's lives and discourse of engaged fatherhood in Polish society. Interestingly, the study indicated that men who more eagerly engage in household chores are more likely to engage in different civic activities. Therefore, being

⁵ Data shows a decrease of men's share in population of smokers and people consuming alcohol (from 36,9% in 2009 to 32,5% in 2014 and from 85% in 2009 to 83% in 2014 respectively)

⁶ Performed both for different types of organizations and institutions (NGOs, sport clubs, students' associations, women/men organizations, informal groups, religious institutions, churches, charities, labor unions, political parties, employer's associations, housing associations, local government bodies, etc.), and individuals (GUS, 2017: 63, 75-77).

⁷ Not comparable data from Public Opinion Research Centre shows almost equal engagement of men and women in voluntary work (respectively 41% and 40%) in 2018 (c.f. CBOS, 2018).

involved in housework translate into more equal attitudes towards gender roles (Kowalska, Warat 2016).

1.6. HOW CAN WORKPLACES SUPPORT CARING MASCULINITIES ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

The long-standing debates on gender equality in Poland have focused mostly on the emancipation of women. The struggles for women's rights in public sphere increased their presence in the labour market and politics, but only to limited extent increased the involvement of men in care activities. The latter has been gradually changing, requiring recognizing care work as important for both women and men. The new model of caring masculinity has begun to emerge mostly in relation to childcare and has been reinforced by public policies, organizational strategies and individual practices. On a policy level, the Labour Code and family policy instruments focus primarily on the rights and provisions of parents. They protect employees from a termination of employment during pregnancy, maternity/paternity/parental leave and after returning from childcare leaves as well as guarantee them a right to flexible work arrangements in order to reconcile work and care. All employees are also entitled to additional 2 days-off to care for their children and 60-day paid leave to care for the members of their families. To raise the awareness of the importance of caring roles performed by men, social campaigns fostering caring masculinities and work-life balance measures have been conducted. They have included workshops and educational projects on men's roles, models of masculinities and the inclusion of men in gender equality actions ("Men for Equality" 2005), campaigns directed at promoting caring fatherhood and fathering ("Being a father" 2005-2006, "How long have you been a father today?" 2006, "National Therapy: Dad's Back" 2007, "Pole! Go on paternity leave!" 2008) or happening to inform men about their rights (such as happening organized by Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment on Father's Day in 2010).

To actively engage the employers to implement work-life balance measures, Family-Friendly Employers project (part of the President Family Policy Programme) was launched in 2014 as a part of the Family Policy Programme "Good Climate for a Family". More than 100 companies responded to the call to describe their good practices allowing to reconcile work and family life. They were related to six policy areas: 1) flexible work solutions and leaves, 2) support for employees during the career break related to parenting, 3) leisure, health and education, 4) financial support for parents, 5) childcare facilities, 6) complex approach to work-life balance. The commitment of companies to improve the working conditions for parents is demonstrated in supporting parents' networks / groups established by employees which aimed at improving the organizational conditions for the working parents, providing knowledge on parental topics as well as trainings/workshops/events for parents.

There still exist areas for continued developments and further enhancements to develop organizational culture that foster caring masculinities. To achieve this goal, male employees should be actively engaged and involved in developing policies/strategies to better recognise their needs. The successful implementation of strategies and policies at the company level depends also on the employers' and managers' attitude and their commitment to gender equality. They play a key role in developing and sustaining organizational culture sensitive to care needs of their employees and can be seen as the pioneers of care improvements. Bringing the change requires the managers to challenge the deficiencies in the solutions and procedures directed to men, but also to act as a positive role model. To take the change on the level of a company, a business case might be needed (as noted by the participants of MiC Multiplier Events in Poland). The positive effects on the performance of the entire company and its corporate image as well as deeper sense of satisfaction among employees can be utilised as arguments for the improvements of care-related strategies. Moreover, dissemination on existing antidiscrimination policies and regulations and constant monitoring and evaluation of implemented solution is needed.

The solutions and measures aimed at fostering caring masculinities should be also grounded in a broader context of gender equality policies. Structural factors should be addresses as well. For example, the existing data and studies clearly show that gender pay gap and financial inequality hinder men's take up of care responsibilities. Therefore, prioritising the implementation of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value should be also part of actions enabling men to perform care roles.

The cultural barriers and gender stereotypes should be also addressed to challenge the assumption on maternal responsibility for child rearing. There is a need to increase an effort to encourage men to take part in activities than typically male and to engage in sphere other than professional work. This requires tackling the problem of unpaid work and unequal division of care responsibilities through, among other, awareness-raising campaigns, public policies supporting caring masculinities (e.g. granting individual and non-transferable rights for each parent to a childcare leave), offering financial incentives at the satisfactory level.

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APPENDIX: FIGURES AND TABLES

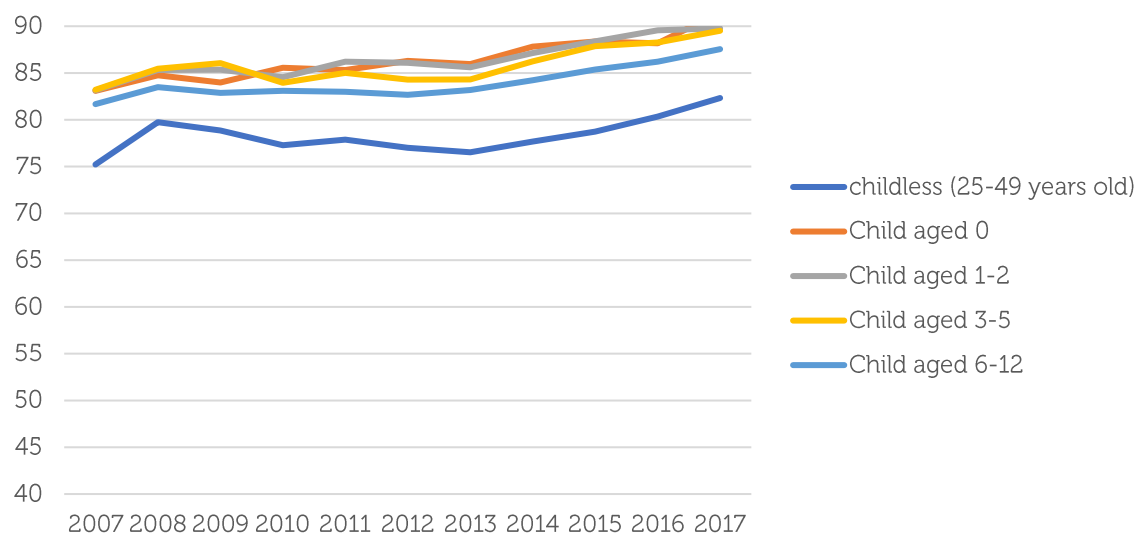


Figure 1. Employment rates of men by age of youngest child, 2007-2017. Source: EU-LFS Microdata

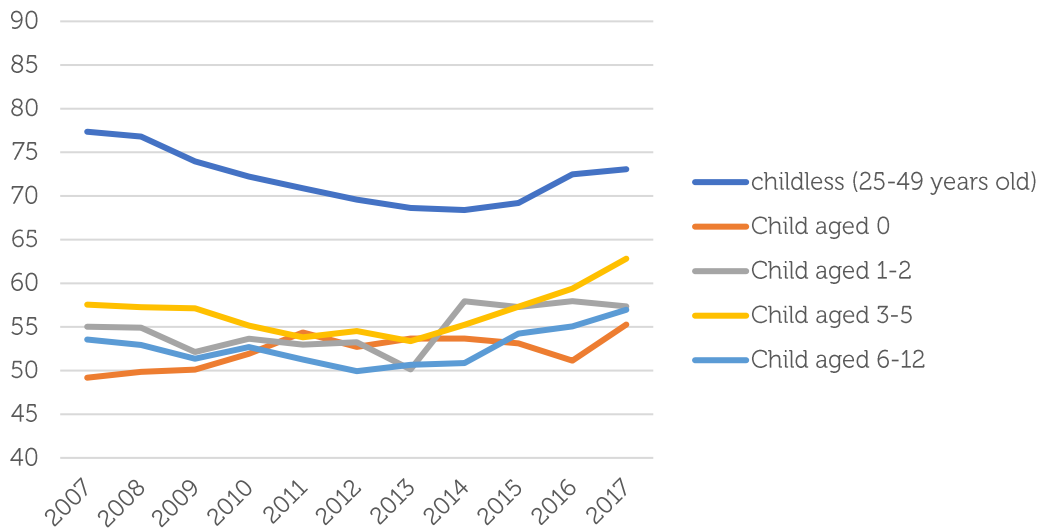


Figure 2 Employment rates of women by age of youngest child, 2007-2017. Source: EU-LFS Microdata.

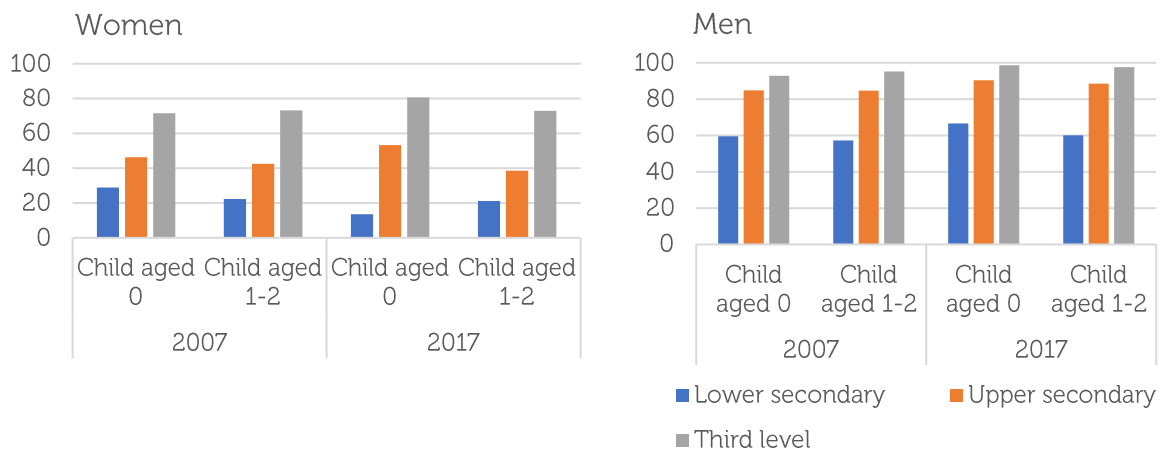


Figure 3 Employment rates of women and men by age of youngest child and education, 2007-2017. Source: EU-LFS Microdata.

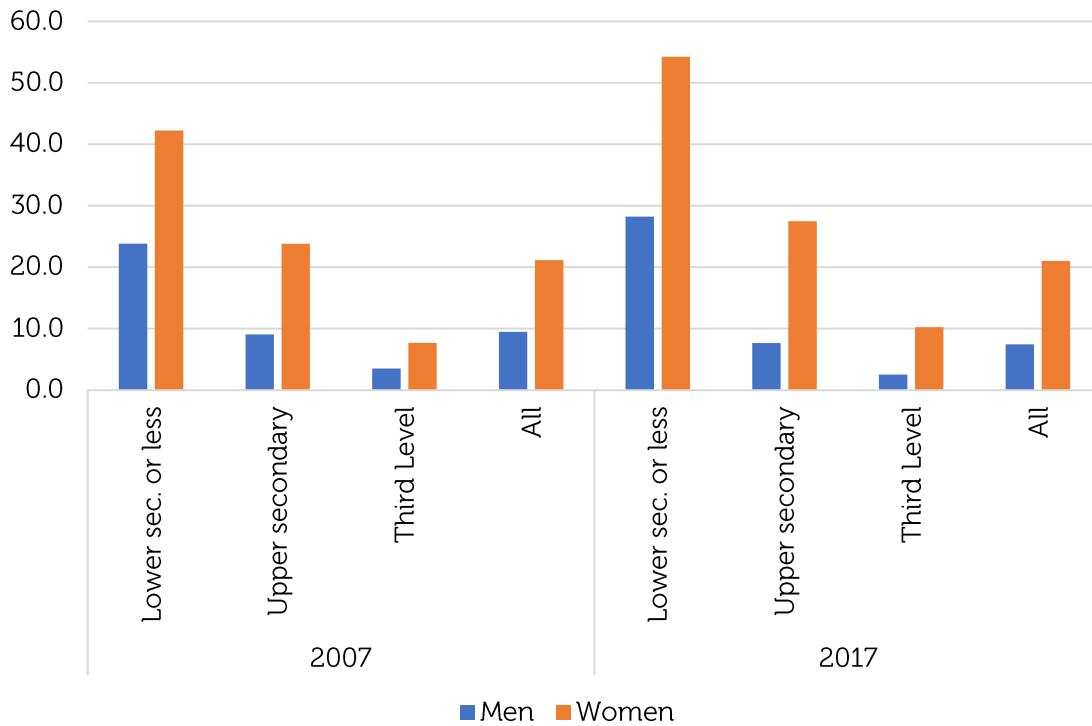


Figure 4 Inactivity rates of women and men (25-49) by education. Source: EU-LFS Microdata.

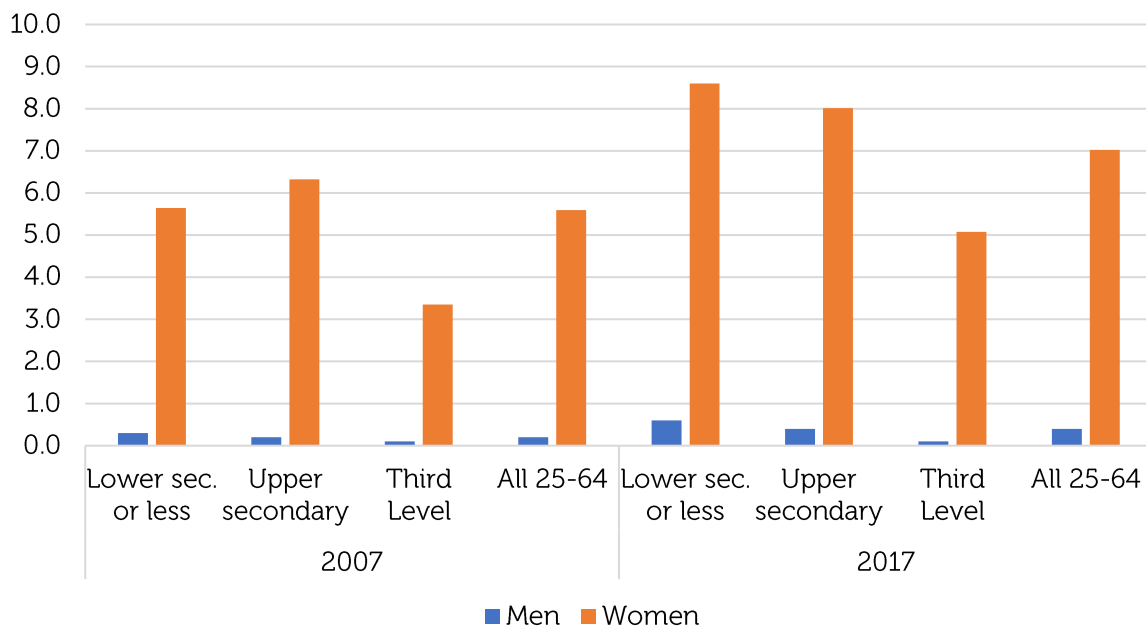


Figure 5 Inactivity rates for family reason by gender and education, people aged 25-64, 2007/2017. Source: EU-LFS Microdata

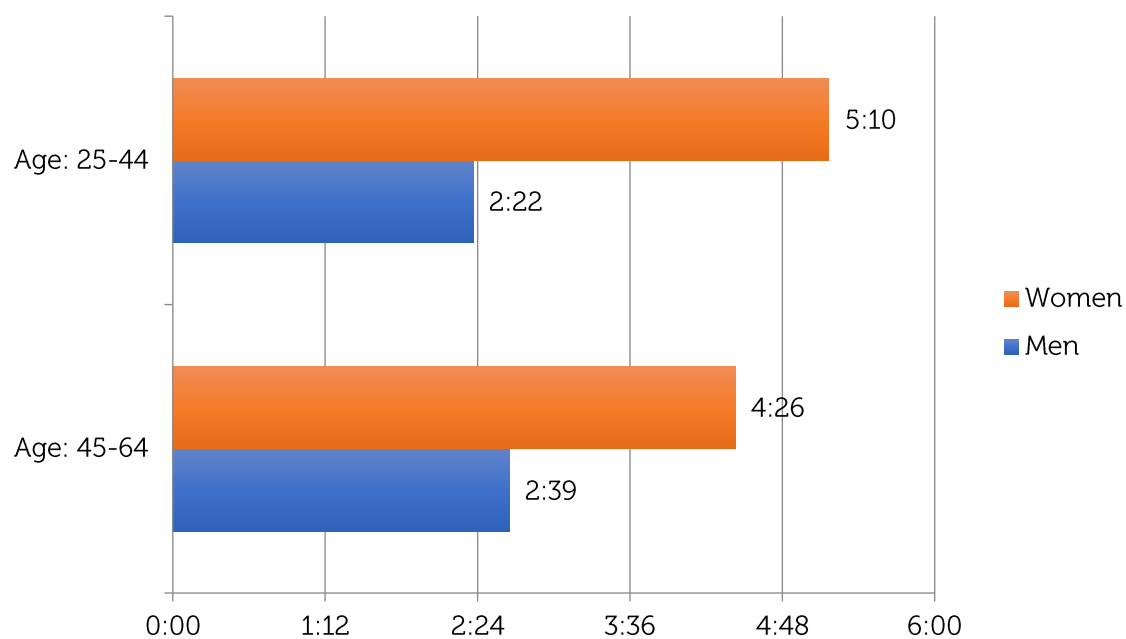


Figure 6 Time spent on household and family care by gender and age, 2010. Source: Time use survey, Eurostat.

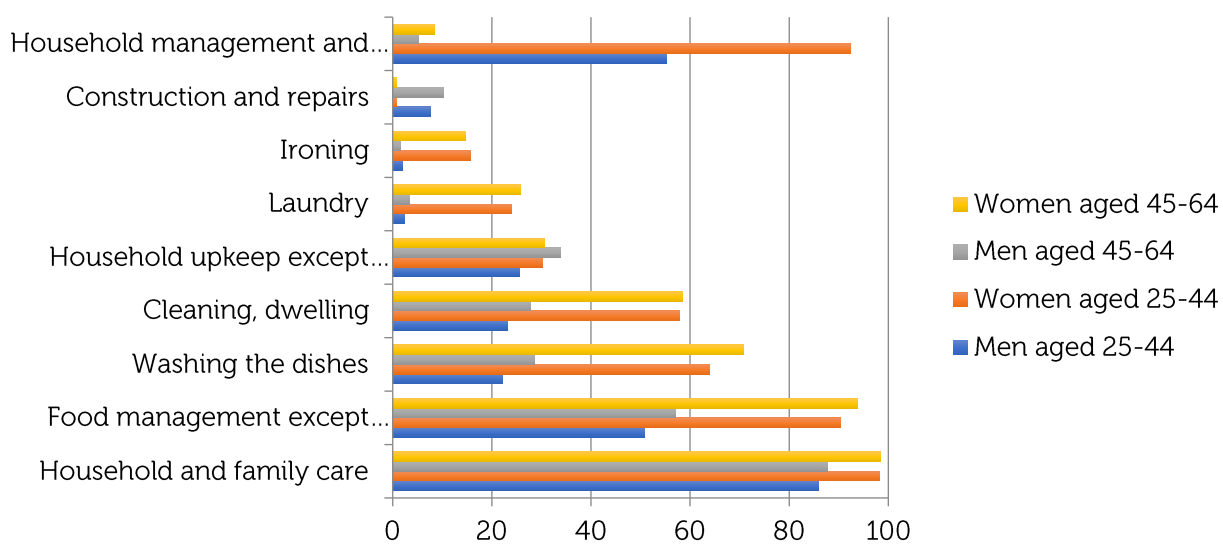


Figure 7 Participation rates in household and care activities by gender, age and type of activity, 2010. Source: Time use survey, Eurostat.

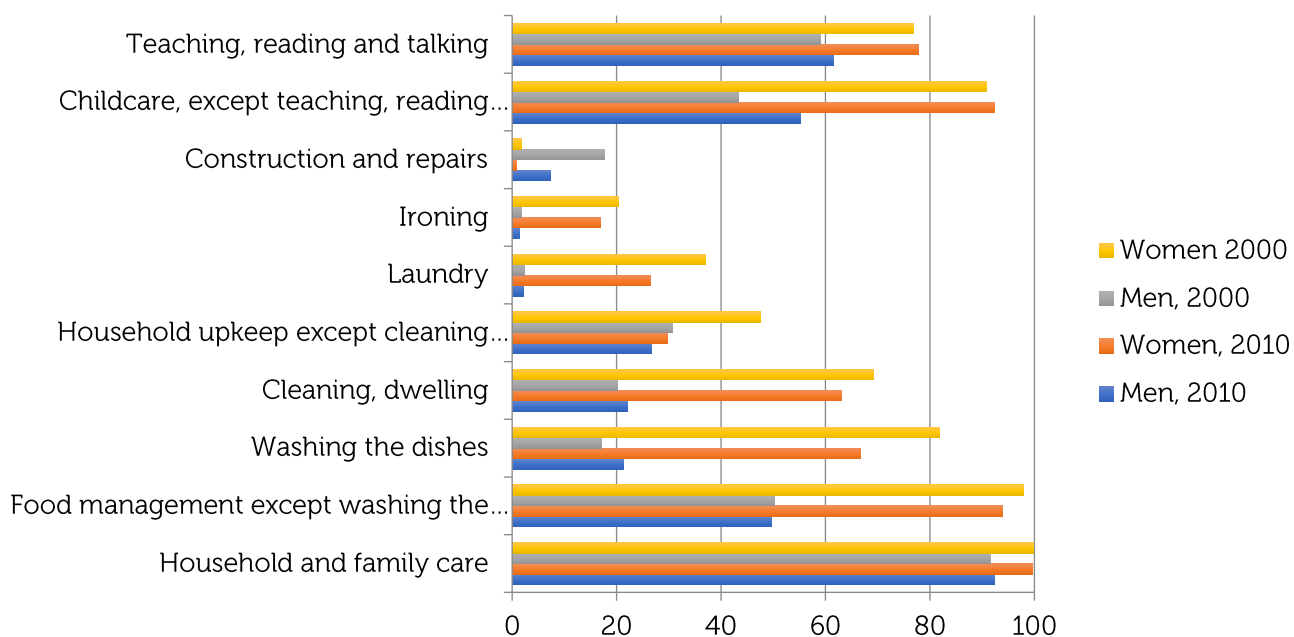


Figure 8 Participation rates in household and care activities by gender and type of activity (people in a couple with children less than 6 years old), 2000/2010. Source: Time use survey, Eurostat.

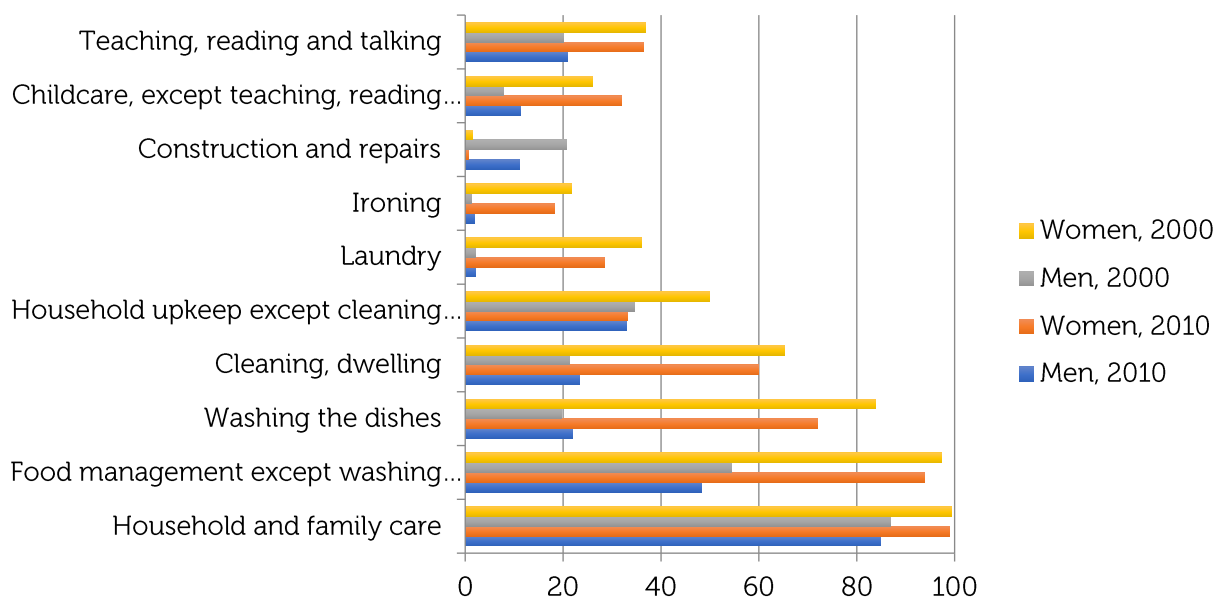


Figure 9 Participation rates in household and care activities by gender and type of activity (people in a couple with youngest child 7-17 years), 2000/2010. Source: Time use survey, Eurostat.

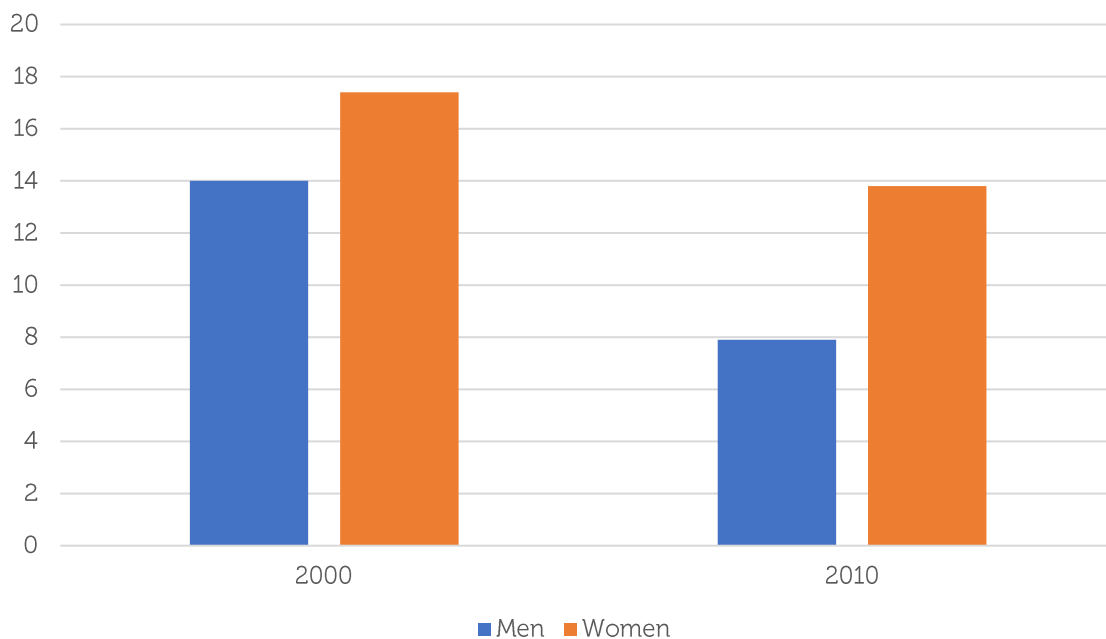


Figure 10 Participation rates in informal help to other households by gender, people 45-64. Source: Time use survey, Eurostat.

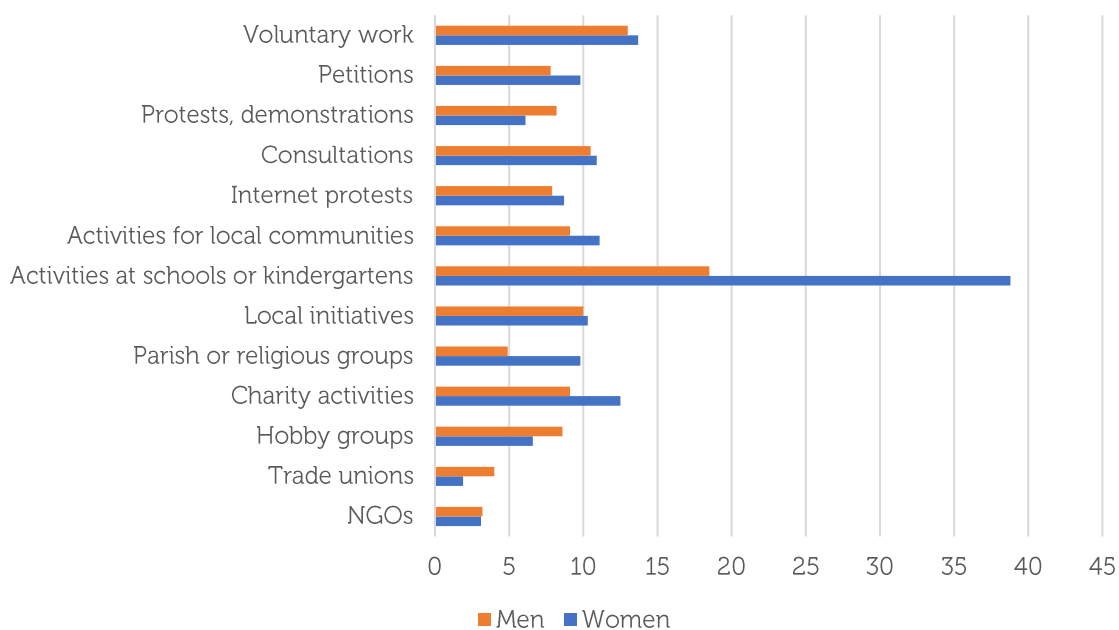


Figure 11 Civic engagement by gender (%). Source: GEQ 2015, quoted in Kowalska, Warat, 2016: 102.

Childless women	Women with children (up to 12 years old)	Gap	Childless men	Men with children (up to 12 years old)	Gap
79,1	67,5	-11,6	79,6	90,2	10,6

Table 1 Economic inactivity rates for women and men (aged 25-49) by family status.
Source: Barcelona objectives 2013: 23

TABL. 4 (72). OSOBY POBIERAJĄCE ZASIŁKI MACIERZYŃSKIE
WEDŁUG RODZAJU POBIERANEGO ZASIŁKU ORAZ PŁCI
RECIPIENTS OF MATERNITY ALLOWANCES
BY TYPE OF MATERNITY ALLOWANCE AND GENDER

WYSZCZEGÓLNIENIE SPECIFICATION		Liczba osób pobierających ^a : Number of recipients of maternity allowances ^a :		
		zasilek macierzyński ^{bc} maternity allowances ^{bc}	zasilek macierzyński z tytułu urlopu ojcowskiego maternity allowance due to paternity leave	zasilek macierzyński z tytułu urlopu rodzicielskiego maternity allowance due to parental leave
		w tys. in thous.		
OGÓŁEM IN TOTAL	2015	671,3	148,4	357,6
	2016	669,1	146,4	395,9
	2017	707,8	174,2	406,6
kobiety females	2015	504,4	x	352,9
	2016	507,7	x	391,7
	2017	519,1	x	402,4
mężczyźni males	2015	166,9	148,4	4,7
	2016	161,3	146,4	4,2
	2017	188,7	174,2	4,2

^a Osoby, którym w danym okresie wypłacono (pobierały) zasiłek macierzyński choć za jeden dzień. ^b Liczba ta oprócz osób pobierających podstawowy zasiłek macierzyński zawiera również osoby, które pobierały zasiłek macierzyński z tytułu urlopu ojcowskiego oraz z tytułu urlopu rodzicielskiego. ^c Unikalność osoby – osoba występuje tylko raz, niezależnie od liczby pobieranych w danym okresie rodzajów zasiłku macierzyńskiego.

^a Recipients who were paid a maternity allowance at least for one day a year. ^b Including recipients of basic maternity allowance, maternity allowance due to paternity leave or parental leave. ^c The unique nature of an individual – an individual appears only once, regardless of the number of maternity allowance types received in a given period.

Table 2 People receiving maternity and paternity allowances. Source: Social Insurance Institution (2019).

2.

**BEST PRACTICES IN POLISH
COMPANIES**

2.1. Introduction

Welfare regime

The Polish welfare system is firmly embedded in historical processes and culture, being influenced especially by communist family policy, transformation in the 90s, and accession to the EU in 2004. It should also be seen in the context of gender inequalities in the labour market (e.g. higher employment rate among men, the gender pay gap, horizontal and vertical segregation) as well as in the area of care and work-life balance (e.g. lower uptake of childcare leave by men, lower engagement of men in care duties and household work). The main characteristics of the system are as follows:

- > Re-familisation of policies in the 90s: the neoliberal framework and cuts in public expenditure shifted the responsibility for care to individuals. Means-tested benefits are available only for the poorest families. Focus on market-based solutions as a way of replacing the state's role. Welfare policies based on a model of explicit familialism and implicit genderization, meaning a normative vision of division of work within the family, with women being considered as the primary care providers and men as breadwinners.
- > Insufficient public institutional support (e.g. nurseries, kindergartens).
- > Recent reforms implemented by the right-wing government shift the policies toward explicit familialism or implicit genderization: increase in financial family support (cash benefit offered within the "Family 500+" program). Insufficient development of state-funded care institutions.
- > Lack of recognition of unpaid domestic work and reproductive work. Insufficient recognition in welfare and gender equality policies of men's involvement in care duties. Family life should be shaped by individuals – the state should not interfere in this sphere.
- > Prevalence of childcare policies which are state funded: paid maternity, paternity and parental leave; paid leave for a sick child; unpaid care leave. Work-life balance measures also regulated by national law and refer mostly to flexible working arrangements.

Some Polish companies or institutions have implemented additional work-life balance measures beyond the ones offered by the State, but their scope in terms of their complexity and innovativeness differs. In general, they are mainly based on Polish labour code and the solutions presented therein; nevertheless, some institutions are working on initiatives that focus more or less on gender-neutral actions and/or on promoting men as carers.

Methodological remarks

The organizational analysis was conducted as a part of a MiC project. It was preceded by a contextual analysis focusing on the current gender (im)balance in the labour market and politics. This analysis was based on the most recent statistical data from LFS and two multiplier events with the representatives of big international companies and corporations (first meeting) as well as medium and small companies, representatives of Labour Offices, trade unions and non-governmental organizations (second meeting). The quantitative analysis and meetings with relevant stakeholders served as a starting point for organizational analysis as they provided the information on the legislative and social context in relation to men's engagement in care; they also helped identify companies that are pro-active in relation to the thematic and establish contacts with gatekeepers.

The aim of the organizational analysis was to *"identify and comparatively analyse best practice models for achieving a high level of work and life balance to enable both men and women to have time and flexibility to care for their family members – specifically aging family members, children, themselves, friends and colleagues – and reduce the gender bias of family support measures in the public and private sectors"* (MiC Application, Annex 1). Secondly, we were interested in the recognition of various aspects of care: in addition to childcare, taking over unpaid public tasks, self-care, care for partners/relatives, and other forms of care (MiC Application, Annex 1).

The fieldwork was conducted between 16 April 2020 and 3 August 2020 in private companies; it addressed organizational experts, male employees who had already utilized the care arrangements ("pioneers" who often question the traditional gender patterns), and their partners. The companies for the study were chosen on the basis of the following criteria:

- > companies interested in gender equality which implement measures in regard to work-life balance and caring masculinities ("best practice" companies);
- > companies with policies/measures addressing a broader understanding of care which goes beyond childcare;
- > companies in which policies/measures on WLB and caring masculinities are actually used and promoted.

The selection criteria directed the study towards large, international corporations. To begin with, longer care leave for an employee is possible only if a replacement can easily be arranged, either by hiring a replacement or delegating responsibilities to another team member. Secondly, a company's organizational culture as well as HR support and bodies responsible for diversity and inclusion make taking care leave easier. Diversity, equality, recognition of individual needs and WLB are among the main values embraced by international companies. They support these values through measures and programs which accommodate employees' needs and help them to maximize their work satisfaction and increase their efficiency. Both conditions are barely met in small and medium-sized companies, while they prevail in large international companies. Therefore, to meet the MiC project's objective on examining good practices on WLB and caring masculinities, we

included companies with progressive policies in this area for which it is important to address the issue of caring masculinities.

Another rationale underlying the sampling for this study was related to a more in-depth exploration of the concept of caring masculinities. Focusing on large corporations gave us a greater chance to address the concept of care which extends beyond childcare, other aspects related to self-care, caring for important others (e.g. family members, friends, local communities, pets, the environment) and to examine how global priorities (defined at the level of the entire company and its all branches) are linked and transferred to the national/local context.

Finally, the aim of the study is to collect and critically analyse personal experiences of engaging in care work. Due to the reasons mentioned above, it seemed that it would be easier to identify and recruit to the study male employees who are actually taking advantage of WLB measures and policies (e.g. parental leave) in large companies located in big cities. Also, the study contributes to the broader issue of the availability and accessibility of these measures and policies to employees working in different positions and with different schedules; it also contributes to the discussion on supportive factors and obstacles.

The validity of our choice was also confirmed by relevant stakeholders who took part in the multiplier events and helped us identify companies with the most progressive measures and policies. Taking into account the sampling rationale and the analysis of companies' policies related to care and WLB, we sent out invitations to four international companies, out of which three agreed to take part in the research (a description of each company can be found in chapter 2). To ensure that we reached a person in each company who is actively engaged in developing measures aimed at gender equality and diversity and who can act as a gatekeeper, the initial contact was facilitated by one of the partners in MiC project, namely Diversity Hub. In all cases, access to these companies was approved and official permission to conduct the research was obtained. Only in one case were the interview guidelines requested before permission to carry out the research was granted. In all companies the choice of respondents was made by the gatekeepers, who identified the most relevant experts and male employees who had already used measures enabling them to balance work and care. Their involvement in tracking down these carers was especially valuable due to their inside position and knowledge; otherwise, it might have been much more difficult to reach them and encourage them to take part in the study. However, such a process of identifying respondents may raise questions about potential bias and informed consent, as respondents might not have been in position to refuse participation in the study.

The interviews with experts, male carers and their partners were conducted simultaneously, but information obtained in previous interviews was taken into account in subsequent ones. The study was planned to be conducted with 3–5 organizational experts, 2–5 male employees in each company, and 2–5 partners of the male employees. Although we achieved the planned number of interviews, their number varies in each company (see Table 3). The sample was very diverse and reflected the 360-degree approach. The organizational experts included various actors who deal with equality, diversity and WLB

policies, such as officers responsible for diversity and inclusion, Human Resources, Compensation and Benefits managers, managers and team leaders, among many others. This diversity of organizational experts enabled us to get in-depth information about particular areas of WLB policies and measures aimed at caring masculinities. In our study we also aimed to open a discussion on care and we did not impose any particular understanding of this concept. Yet, despite the fact that we tried to address various aspects of care, our sample included male employees who had been involved first and foremost in childcare, and to a certain extent they had cared for partners / parents / family well-being / the environment, as well as for themselves. Their understanding and practice of care steered the discussion in a particular direction and impacted the scope of the discussed policies and measures. All male carers were also asked to invite their partners/wives to take part in the study. Despite our best efforts to reach partners, only seven partners/wives agreed to be interviewed. The others either did not want to take part in the research or refused due to a lack of time caused by their professional involvement or childcare duties. Interestingly, the partners/wives who were interviewed either worked in the same company and/or are committed to gender equality and supporting greater involvement of men in care.

	EXPERTS	CARERS	PARTNERS
COMPANY 1	5	9	3
COMPANY 2	3	4	1
COMPANY 3	3	4	3

Table 3 Number of interviews

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online (through MS Teams, Skype, Webex) or by telephone. Importantly, all interview participants were working remotely (mostly from home) at the time of the interviews. In a few cases, interviews were disrupted by children, and one respondent was taking care of a sleeping newborn to give his wife a rest, but this did not affect the interview process. This allowed to “experience” / “observe” these parents’ care arrangements in practice as they wrestled to reconcile care and work during the pandemic. All respondents were informed about the project (in an email preceding the interview and at the beginning of the interview) and confirmed their informed consent to take part in the study. All interviews were based on the guidelines prepared as part of the MiC project (separately for experts, carers and their partners), however, each time these were adjusted to the situation of the respondent such as their work position and/or caring duties. Overall, the interview guidelines consisted of the following sections: the respondents’ experiences in reconciling professional work and caring duties; the programs / measures / policies available in their companies; the supportive factors and obstacles faced while undertaking care duties; as well as the

opinions about the existing programs / measures and recommendations on what is needed to improve existing policies in the company.

2.2. Company summaries

Company 1 – private financial services company

This company is a large international company within the financial sector that employs over 6,000 people in Poland. Large group of employees are students and young graduates. In Poland, the average employee age is 28–29 years old, which partially explains this company's focus of policy on parents, and work and child-care reconciliation.

The company has received several awards for its HR and family-friendly policies; it has also been positively evaluated for its voluntary work and financial contribution to local communities. Nevertheless, no detailed data on gender structure was made available for the purpose of the report, but the interviewed experts ensure that the company's branch in Poland is quite balanced in terms of gender, with slight overall advancement of women. Therefore, further interpretation regarding company's progress in this regard is not possible for the purpose of this report.

Regarding GE indicators and WLB solutions, the company has created a global unit responsible for planning and implementing its Diversity and Inclusion Policy, with regional representations who support offices in the region. Although at company level there is general support for caring masculinities, the company's policy focuses mainly on caring for children, for which it initiates measures and solutions. Although it provides flexible forms of work, their range is limited to those available in the Polish law system. The aforementioned policy results in limiting men's prospects and possibilities for men to engage in care.

As estimated by the interviewed experts, the proportion of men who take long care leave is very small compared to women. According to the interviewees, maternity leave and parental leave are not shared between partners but taken by a mother solely. Nevertheless, short-term leave for dependents and children is taken by male employees quite often.

Although this company declares that it supports caring masculinities, its initiative is mainly limited to informing employees about the possibility of sharing parental leave. Therefore, the company should be more involved in GE issues and caring masculinities.

In principle, the company's organization of work in Poland assumes remote work for 20–25% of employees. According to the experts, who were interviewed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of employees working remotely has increased to 98%. Setting limits of remote work availability for employees (to a level of 20–25%) reduces employees' ability

to take over care duties. Care leave for relatives other than children is not mentioned/promoted by the company and is not taken up by its employees. Although this company offers an open and supportive culture for caring masculinities, it lacks initiatives encouraging men to take care leave and caring roles (for instance, by providing special benefits for caring men, providing caring role models).

To sum up, there are many measures available for caring masculinities in Company 1, but their take-up among male employees remains rather low. Despite the company's open and supportive organizational culture for caring masculinities, it mainly focuses on measures and benefits regarding WLB. The main obstacles for caring masculinities in this company are the lack of general gender mainstreaming policy, the deficit in addressing men as carers, and the lack of generally available WLB solutions.

Company 2 – private international banking entity

Company 2 is an international banking institution with about 10,000 employees in Poland, the majority of which are female. However, there is no women in the board and there is gender imbalance as women are underrepresented in higher positions in the company structure. According to the interviewed expert, the main indicators show that gender equality has not yet been achieved in many areas.

From the perspective of WLB policies (including measures supporting undertaking care duties), it is important to note the rather young profile of this company's employees; this has a considerable impact on measures to support care duties and on the general understanding of care in the company, which is mostly related to small children.

Company's organizational culture is based on three values: diversity, equality, inclusion and work-life balance. These values determine the priorities for the company's development, establishing a position among other companies within the same sector. They also affect the employees by encouraging them to balance between professional excellence, personal growth and quality of their life. This organizational culture creates a framework not only for the company's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy; it is also present in other areas such as the benefit system, training and workshops, as well as employees' networks. The commitment to these values is also reflected in measures focusing on maintaining work-life balance, including arrangements for care purposes. On the one hand, these include measures present in the national Labour Code (such as various types of care leave, flexible work arrangements); on the other hand, these include an inclusive and supportive communication strategy. Yet, there is still room for improvement and gaps which should be addressed. One of the biggest limitations is the narrow understanding of care which is strongly linked to parental duties. Therefore, there is a need to broaden the meaning of care so that it embraces employees' care for themselves, their parents, friends, local communities or the environment. Secondly, due to cultural gender norms and expectations as well as existing gender inequalities in the labour market in general, the focus is on the position of women. The concept of caring masculinities has been slowly emerging, both in company policies and male employees' approaches and practices. This shows the importance of the cultural and national context, which heavily shapes how the organizational culture is perceived and how the measures available at the company are used. In addition to developing comprehensive and clear communication about the measures available to male employees, there is also a need to increase men's involvement in care. Looking at flexible working arrangements and care policies from a gender

perspective would enable better understanding of the outcomes of these measures for male and female employees regarding their work-life balance and quality of life. Finally, a discussion is needed on how to better link the concept of caring masculinities and policies that support them with gender equality. The identified challenges indicate direct, immediate changes but also require more structural and organizational changes. Among the former, the carers and the experts highlight the need to improve communication strategy and adopt more pro-active approach to caring masculinities, to better disseminate knowledge on measures and policies supporting caring masculinities, to promote role models or organizing workshops/training to managers to extend their knowledge on measures supporting caring masculinities and change their attitude towards flexible working arrangements. The latter focuses on developing a fathers' network (as a bottom-up activity), providing additional care leave that could be introduced by the company (in addition to national regulations), support for institutional care (in a form of kindergarten/nursery/day-care centre at the company premises or financial contribution to such institutions), and developing measures related to aspects of care other than childcare.

Company 3 – private entity, energy sector

This company is part of a global group of companies with over 4,000 employees in Poland, of which 2/3 are women. The company has received awards recognizing its efforts in relation to creating good work conditions and endorsing gender equality initiatives. The leadership positions globally are often taken by women: women constitute 70% of directors and leaders in this company in Poland. In regard to men's engagement in care, the topic is promoted in this company, even if it does not provide any tailored solutions for employees in relation to caring masculinities. The framework for talking about men's engagement in care and work-life balance in general seems to be widely related to the company's general value framework of endorsing values such as respect, inclusion, and diversity. In relation to this framework, a coordinator for diversity and inclusion is responsible for diversity and inclusion strategy, which also includes all aspects of work-life balance or father engagement.

Care as a concept is very important in the company in regard to diverse activities and relations – the company caring for its staff, HR office taking care of employees, managers caring for their team, the staff taking care of their own wellbeing and competences to manage work and care for their families. This has become even more visible and central in the pandemic. Care in case of men is related mostly to their role of a father, but some measures relate to general wellbeing/self-care/health. Promoting a speak-up culture, openness towards discussing care arrangement and one's wellbeing can be seen as an important context for men's engagement in care. As the role of the manager here is important and very much based on their attitudes, access to some solutions/measures may be still person dependent.

The use of the measures guaranteed by the national framework is also seen as an employee right while the company's role is to enable it. This framework was in fact seen as accessible by employees who stressed the support from the HR office and positive impact of the global framework of work-life balance on their decisions e.g. in relation to taking a parental leave. Use of parental leave is growing, with paternity leave becoming almost a norm, and sharing parental leave is on the rise although it is still not widespread. Gender stereotypes, including expectations of men's high work engagement with no career interruptions and lack of

awareness of the possibility to flexibly share parental leave were perceived as main barriers in taking parental leaves. The possibility of remote work along with flexible work schedule was evaluated as a critical tool for work-life balance and its accessibility was rated as high. The pandemic has made those solutions even more accessible, also to those who previously had limited access to it. In general, before the pandemic access was limited to about 1-2 days of remote work. However, apart from many positive aspects, due to a relatively intense work environment in the company and overburden with tasks, this framework may lead to overworking and blurring the line between family life and work.

To recap, the company culture seems to create a safe environment for work-life balance. There are events that directly communicate the values of men's engagement in care for children and their families, as well as in self-care. The awareness of culture in relation to care and its impact on the use of care leaves is noticeable, nevertheless the company does not offer any particular/tailored tools to support male carers. On the basis of our research, it is impossible to assess if short-tenure workers, in operational positions have the same access to solutions as long-tenure staff, specialists and managers.

Discussion: Context & care in the organization

The conducted analysis shows that while Company 1 and Company 2 do not differ significantly in terms of implemented solutions for male carers and advancement of WLB measures, especially when compared to other large international corporations based in Poland, Company 3 seems to be more advanced in terms of communication about men's engagement in care. As indicated above, all the analysed companies aim to create adequate conditions for their staff apply the work-life balance measures provided by the national law. Specifically, they do not offer any individual, tailor-made programs enabling men to take up care responsibilities such as additional leave for fathers or measures to care for e.g. the elderly or other dependents.

Sharing care responsibilities is an employee right, the leave is your right, you have a right to parental or paternity leave. (Company 3 / Expert)

At this point, the focus is to raise awareness about the available solutions and promote caring attitudes among male staff rather than to develop new measures for male carers and WLB. Additionally, a lot of attention is paid to the employees' psychological wellbeing with awareness-raising campaigns, workshops and measures related to psychological support which partially has also been strengthened by the pandemic. On top of that, the companies focus on developing a benefit system, providing employees, for instance, with medical service packages. Even though solutions for WLB in the companies are implemented as relatively gender-neutral, male employees are not fully aware of solutions focusing on care such as parental leave and details related to taking such leaves. This suggests that more attention should be paid to proactive communication and awareness raising strategies and activities, which would also be targeted at counteracting gender stereotypes and cultural norms which constitute a contextual barrier for men's engagement. Promoting role models and networking among fathers are seen as solutions in that regard:

It is necessary to share success-stories, to publicize, promote real-life stories and to show the career path for an employee who is a man, not a woman, explain what happened in individual phases, because there is such a general understanding somewhere, a belief that longer breaks are for maternity leave, that it is the woman who does it [take care of the children], not the man, and we have a number of possibilities to promote and share those other stories with our employees. (Company 1 / Expert)

Regarding male carers, all the analysed companies focus mainly on parenthood and childcare which suggests that more attention should be paid to other aspects of care.

2.3. Comparative analysis II: Supportive factors & barriers for male carers

Supportive factors enabling men to take up unpaid care tasks

A comparative analysis of all the three companies reveals many similarities regarding factors enabling men to take on care responsibilities. One of the main reasons explaining them is related to **the companies' profiles and working structures**. All the three companies are international corporations with numerous staff. Such a structure enables smooth running of the organizations in case of a care leave: no individual employee is indispensable and it is easier to identify a replacement and pass on the responsibilities without disturbance for the company and work sustainability. Within this process, a critical role is performed by the manager responsible for work organization.

The usage of WLB measures and flexible work arrangements is also facilitated by staff composition. All the three companies target young and middle-aged, well-educated employees, which is important in the context of supporting male carers for two reasons. Firstly, at the company level, a rather homogenous profile of employees leads to a better understanding of employee needs and translates into developing coherent policies in response to them. Secondly, at the team level, working with colleagues who have reached a similar life stage facilitates better support and understanding from team members and therefore encourages them to use the measures offered by the companies. Yet, in this context a dissonance emerges: while young men are more willing to take childcare leaves and interested in them, flexible work arrangements are more accessible to staff occupying higher positions and with longer tenure in the company.

The higher the position, the easier it is for the staff - both women and men, because... well, the job related to managing people, it requires a little less participation in the process of doing what is done there on a daily basis and managers have much simpler and real opportunities to take advantage of the benefits that the company offers. (Company 1 / Expert)

Another important supportive factor is **company culture**. Being a global company, with headquarters in countries with more progressive solutions and strong interest in diversity and inclusion make it easier to raise the gender equality issue as well as to transfer and implement solutions in this field. Although the companies vary regarding the advancement of the implemented measures and the progress of internal discussion on supporting men, they all relate to values such as diversity, equality, inclusion, respect, care or wellbeing as guidance for their codes of conducts. These values are also reflected in the companies' policies, events and workshops as well as in their communication strategies. The recognition of measures supporting care roles (including self-care) sends out a clear signal that care is valued and it facilitates taking care leaves. Moreover, the employees see that their wellbeing care roles are appreciated and desirable.

Without the sympathy, without my wife and my own conviction, without such feedback from my superiors that it [equal division of parental leave] is welcome, that it is not seen as a whim, as strange behaviour, and without assurances that everything is ok here, that you can take the leave and that upon your return nothing will change in the way you are treated, (...) we would certainly not have made the decision [to share the leave]. Even if [...] the state gave the opportunity to do so, I think that without such a positive approach of the managers in the company, we would not have made use of these measures. (Company 2 / Carer_2)

There are also slight differences between the companies on how **wellbeing** is approached and perceived. In one of the companies, there is more focus on wellbeing as part of the brand recognition strategy. In this case, wellbeing has become one of key factors through which companies compete in the labour market to become the leader in this area and through which they make sure that their offer resonates with their present and future employees. On the other hand, in another company which took part in the study, wellbeing is first and foremost seen as a company value and goes beyond the wellbeing program by addressing the standards which regulate everyday work.

Gender equality is perceived as an important goal in all the three companies but so far most measures undertaken to address gender inequalities target those experienced by women (e.g. in decision-making), a discussion on caring masculinities has been just initiated and is focused mostly on fatherhood. To a certain extent, the measures regarding male carers are linked to other aspects of gender inequalities (such as the gender pay gap), but they definitely address **traditional gender roles dominant in the Polish context** which have a negative impact on men taking on care responsibilities. While generally it may be observed that women predominantly make use of the measures enabling them to work and perform care duties, two factors are mentioned in one of the companies as challenging the male breadwinner and female carer model. Firstly, the **intercultural environment** (i.e. when team members come from different cultures/countries) might be seen as a factor facilitating caring masculinities. By showing a perspective from countries/cultures with greater involvement of men in care, a good example and role models may be provided,

solutions which are unpopular in Poland may be encouraged, and ultimately - gender norms on care and expectations toward men and women may change. It may also encourage companies to implement new solutions which are available in other countries. Secondly, the fact that the companies operate in the **largest cities** in Poland where a new model of involved fatherhood redefining parental obligations of men is more common, easier to develop and put into practice may also translate into greater expectations of male employees to be offered measures supporting involved fatherhood. As the model of involved fatherhood is more acceptable and less questioned in large cities, it is also easier to implement such solutions at the company level.

I am from [a big city], and unlike in the rural areas, there is no mother-in-law, where just women take care of children. This is a large city, you can take parental leave and women pass it on to fathers. Men take more care of their homes: they cook, spend time with their kids. Cooking has even become trendy among men living in cities. (Company 3/ Carer)

The critical factor enabling and encouraging men to reconcile work and care raised in all the companies is **management style**. Although there are different styles of leadership among managers in the three companies, prioritizing either support for flexible working arrangements and care-friendly measures for men or lack of trust towards employees using these measures, both the experts and male carers note the increasingly positive approach among managers in the pro-care and pro-equality direction. Their openness to various career paths and staff needs, understanding and support is highlighted and valued. Without support from their manager, male carers would find it impossible to take paternity leave even though it is allowed by the law. Managers are expected to provide information about the measures available in their company, to discuss each individual's career path (also when they return from a leave) and to organize work during their absence. What was particularly important in two of the companies in relations between the manager and staff member is "the speak-up culture" and regular, individual meetings which create a safe environment to discuss the solutions available to an employee and to express their needs. Considerable attention is devoted also to the role of managers in building an inclusive and supportive culture based on trust and mutual understanding for all team members, regardless of their family situation and measures used to support their care duties, which aligns with the company values. Whether the manager is male or female also needs to be taken into account adding to this already complex picture. In two of the companies, female managers are seen as more willing to discuss and support taking of measures such as care leave. They are seen as more understanding towards male employees as well as recognizing and supporting their needs to a greater extent. In addition, in one of these companies a stronger sympathy for male carers and family-friendly policies has been also observed among managers in a similar family situation (especially in relation to childcare), regardless of their gender. Therefore, sharing similar experiences is a factor facilitating better understanding and support for caring obligation of male employees.

The measures supporting caring masculinities have been raised at the company level thanks to the establishment of **bodies responsible for diversity and inclusion**. Recognizing the importance of the topic, such bodies have undertaken various actions aimed at

challenging attitudes towards caring duties and gender roles, raising awareness and knowledge about company policy as well as male staff members' rights but also the challenges which they face while reconciling work and care. Their commitment to provide an environment based on values such as respect for others, trust, openness enables employees to reach their professional potential and facilitates caring masculinities.

The concept of caring masculinities and measures enabling men to reconcile work and care is also supported by **internal, bottom-up networks** (especially related to parenthood, but also to sport, health and general wellbeing). They facilitate men's engagement in care through workshops, trainings, meetings but also develop opportunities to improve their work environment. Equally important is the **Human Resource Department** responsible mostly for dissemination of information and procedural support. It offers support on up-to-date legal and company regulations through one-to-one meeting to discuss individual arrangements; it also provides toolkits, especially concerning childcare (e.g. taking and returning from leaves).

The picture of the support for male caring attitudes in the companies through the **implementation of official regulations** related to childcare and flexible work arrangements is to some extent unclear. On the one hand, it would be difficult not to perceive the limitation of such an approach which narrows down the measures mostly to the requirements of the national law and highlights the context of parenthood. On the other hand, it seems that this approach sets the framework for the measures implemented by the companies. It has also been argued that the Polish national framework is quite rich and offers staff an appropriate range of solutions. Moreover, what distinguishes the companies is the scope of flexible work arrangements (i.e. the number of days of remote work) and the support offered (from managers, team members and technical support alike) but so far, no additional benefits or incentives from the companies have been offered to carers. Moreover, role models, that is male carers who by sharing their experience encourage other employees to consider greater involvement in care are not sufficiently visible at company level. Yet, there are positive role models outside the companies who have impact on the uptake of care leave and approach towards fatherhood.

Barriers preventing men from taking up unpaid care tasks

Caring masculinities are still not perceived as relevant to gender equality or as an important dimension in developing work-life balance solutions. This is backed by a lack of public debate on conditions and benefits for working fathers reconciling work and family life. As noticed by an expert, the companies focus on women as the main receivers and users of the offered care solutions:

At the moment, when it comes to Poland, and this is my observation, very few organizations launch such conscious measures aimed at men. (Company 1/ Expert)

While in all the three companies debate or at least interest in men's engagement in care is emerging, it seems that in Company 3 discussion on the value framework is more audible and known to staff as potentially strongly explicated and demonstrated through activities and through internal communication. In all the three companies, there is more emphasis on women-related aspects of gender equality, with the **aspect of caring masculinities passing undiscussed and unemphasized** (Company 1 and 2) or discussed and emphasized only to a limited extent (Company 3).

There was no reflection what it [parental leave sharing] means to me as an employee, to my career, but also to me on the psychological level, to my personal development. I know this is an individual decision, a family decision. (...) But there should be reflection on it and awareness of it. I talked to my colleagues and they were surprised that it is possible to share parental leave or to take it together. I would want this consciousness to grow among the staff and the employers. (Company 3 / Partner)

In Company 3, there is a clear strategy to **showcase good practices of work-life balance, for instance** sharing parental leave, with leadership clearly voicing their engagement in the issues of gender equality, diversity and inclusion, but in the two other companies more effort needs to be put into sharing men's success stories. In the two other companies lack of such role models may be seen as a barrier in searching for adequate work-life balance solutions, particularly in relation to new employees.

Beyond the discourse on care and wellbeing, corporate life is said to be **intense in terms of work**, demand full engagement, with overload and stress, pressure for career advancement and promotion, measured by productivity outcomes in case of some employees. Moreover, men's perception of being irreplaceable and therefore not allowing themselves a break from work, not having time for additional activities and constantly having to meet deadlines may hinder the application of WLB solutions as well.

I would love to take part in most of the trainings that are available, but as I say, time is limited, so if I would later like to devote myself to my homelife, I am unable to participate in them all (...). (Company 3 / Carer)

Another challenge may constitute **the relations with the line manager**. Personal attitudes, ambitions, stereotypes of the manager constitute an important context that in some cases may hinder discussion on work-life balance solutions. In case of some measures, there are no clear regulations as to who can grant them, thus the application of informal criteria means that the manager has more impact on work conditions of their employees than formal regulations. It has to be noticed though that more a personal, informal approach is also valued as regulations may not encompass all the life situations requiring work-life solutions. Tenure in the company may be a barrier here, as managers allow those with some work experience in their company (or those who have earned trust) to work remotely.

Understanding for caring duties? It depends on the line manager and type of work, but in general I believe there is such an openness from the managers'

side. (...) after my first child's birth and it was a demanding child, I had to work evenings, but – after negotiations – we agreed that I need to give up a bit, so this is time for my family. (...) much depends on the manager – what is important are their traits – openness, maturity, and trust towards an employee. (Company 3 / Carer)

These issues come up in all the companies, with Company 3 trying to find solutions in case a staff member is unsatisfied with their manager (complaint procedure). In Company 2, it was stressed that there is a lack of open and effective communication when planning to apply the measures supporting care and raising awareness about them. This is related to both – communication with the manager and with team members.

The issue of **work pressure** becomes clear when working remotely, which due to overburden with tasks often results in overworking and **blurring the line between work and family life**. These aspects are visible in all the three companies, with the exception that Company 3 tries to set up clearer guidelines to protect the work-life balance e.g. by not allowing managers to send emails after 7pm or at weekends, discouraging staff who are unwell from coming to the office. Still, in all the companies there were voices stressing that high intensity of work makes it impossible to use some WLB solutions, or e.g. take care of one's health/do sports.

Other features specific to the companies include:

- international character of the companies – while it may be a supportive condition at times, the cultural norms of managers may become a barrier or demand more time for negotiation;
- position – some positions do not allow remote work or flexible work schedule, or leadership positions do not allow for part-time arrangements;
- career moment – the tenure in the company seems to have an impact with short tenure staff having fewer chances to negotiate work conditions, and having rarer access to remote work.

The **cultural model of parenthood** which emphasizes the role of mother as the primary caregiver and gender stereotypes also prevent men from using measures supporting their care duties. This model assumes an auxiliary role of the father, where men's responsibility for childcare is understood as taking children to school, to extracurricular activities in the evenings or taking care of their leisure activities, and it is perpetuated to some extent by the employees themselves, by their managers, through informal cues or comments. While Company 3 pays particular attention to inclusion in relation to participation of men in care, promoting and praising fathers who took parental leave, even their informal comments appear to make men ill-at-ease. Internalized stereotypes are seen as an important obstacle to choose WLB solutions, even if they are accessible – the 'barriers in the heads of men' have been emphasized in all the companies, underlying the importance of the cultural

context. Here, also the availability of grandparents or living with them may reinforce cultural expectations.

[Parental leave taken by a man] is a novelty for everyone, it is not a natural thing. (Company 2 / Carer)

My decision made many people aware that there is such a possibility and that a guy can also take such a leave. I don't think anyone expected that this could happen. (Company 2 / Carer)

In all the three companies, there is an awareness of the financial determinants of care, as in general men often earn more than women. In case of staff with higher salaries, smaller allowance during leaves did not constitute a problem in general, but in case of women with a significantly lower salary than their partner this may have an impact on the application of this solution (in fact, there were companies, not participating in our study, which substituted the remaining 20% during the care leave in the COVID-19 pandemic to their employees).

In relation to parental leave, it seems that the respondents in all the companies wanted **more information and awareness campaigns** on flexible parental leave. Not knowing how this leave can be taken, in what time frame, in what modalities, and until what year of the child's life, may limit its popularity.

Regarding a flexible work schedule, Company 2 experts underlined lack of legal regulations to implement task-based work. The Labour Code is based on the working time logic (i.e. 8 hours/day) while it is more effective and beneficial to evaluate employees' work based on the tasks they have completed.

Care during the COVID-19 pandemic

In all the analysed companies the COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant change in the respondents' professional and private life. On the one hand, it posed a challenge for the existing childcare practices due to a lack of institutional support or/and help from grandparents. On the other hand, change in the place and form of work (moving from office to home/remote work) led to mental and physical burden which in general created new conditions for policies and practices of work-life balance.

It was a critical point in my life to balance it all – school and preschool are closed and we need to work. It was a huge challenge, to set it up... to give breakfast, clean up, make lunch, make sure kids are not on tablets all day, and then have an important work 'call' (meeting) with the children next to me – an international one, with 10 countries. That was a huge challenge to me. (Company 3 / Carer)

Parents' overburden caused by the necessity to provide care for children or/and support in their educational activities has been reported to have an impact on the employees' ability to work. This situation has resulted in a well-planned but flexible division of care and work between parents. It also meant the introduction of reconciliation strategies that included: flexible working hours (working in the morning or/and late in the evening), taking turns to work and look after children (some parents took care leaves, others divided the week into 'mother's' and 'father's' days of care/work), staying with or moving in with relatives so they could support parents in childcare. For some of the interviewed men the pandemic proved to have a rather negative impact on their career as they reported lack of time for additional tasks and projects necessary for promotion. Other obstacles reported by the respondents were lack of suitable working space and the subsequent separation from their family, difficulties in keeping up with their school children's level of education and quality-attention to young children, conflict situations (e.g. overlapping meetings, tiredness), lack of a clear line between work and private life resulting in the feeling that work never ends and initial problems with web-based communication between employees (from face-to-face meetings perceived as more effective than e-mail/phone/skype contact).

The interviewed men also mentioned some positive effects of the pandemic. The carers admitted that combining work and care at home enabled them to spend more time with their children and partners (e.g. doing sports, walking, eating, playing together) which resulted in the development of better relations between them:

It is a small positive change, because [before the pandemic] we didn't spend so much time together and [we didn't] spend so much time with our daughter. (Company 1 / Carer)

It also affected their lifestyles: some of the interviewed men mentioned taking better care of their health as working from home allowed them to have more time for sport or to improve their eating habits. Lastly, the choice by most of the male respondents to work remotely rather than take care leave proved to be very helpful in the context of completing work tasks, providing better working conditions (e.g. no time need to commute), combining work and care, offering flexible working hours and planning/organizing their workday personally.

In order to support parental roles of the employees, their mental health and wellbeing, the investigated companies introduced several solutions to help them deal with the daily duties of care and work, and those included:

- > organizing regular team/network meetings to discuss both, work-related and private issues (all the three companies);
- > providing greater availability of flexible working hours and remote work than before the COVID-19 pandemic (all the three companies);
- > online workshops/entertainment or/and an internal website with materials for children (Company 1, 2);
- > promoting understanding of employees and trust in them (Company 1, 2);

- > promoting wellbeing activities, online sport activities or teleconferences with psychologists, advice from dieticians, physiotherapists (Company 1, 2);
- > providing technical and logistic support - monitors, routers, laptops, office spaces for employees in need (Company 1, 3);
- > organizing workshops/trainings on combining work and care obligations, and on remote work (Company 1, 3);
- > conducting survey of the adopted WLB measures, best working practices and their evaluation, the employees' and particularly parents' needs (Company 1);
- > lowering the targets or offering extra pay even if the employee's effectiveness was lower (Company 2).

In general, it is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic will also bring changes to the companies themselves. Firstly, it is believed that remote work will become more common and further promoted by all of the investigated organizations as it has proved to be an effective measure in work-life reconciliation and work performance. Secondly, experts working in Company 1 and 3 have noticed that the pandemic has extended the understanding of care itself. As an integral part of life it refers not only to parenthood but also to care for and about other dependents, relatives, friends, and oneself. Moreover, it is stressed that during the COVID-19 pandemic the culture of understanding and acceptance has strengthened while communication between managers and employees has improved.

2.4. Good practices

Although the analysed companies do not differ much in terms of their measures for work-life balance and male carers, the available solutions may be divided into the ones that are legally available and present in the companies and those which are a particular company's own initiative. Nevertheless, it is important to notice that changes in state regulations and the introduction of a non-transferable paternity leave and gender-neutral parental leave (and the possibility to share it equally between the partners) has had significant impact on supporting men's active engagement in childcare. Additionally, apart from the possibility to take up the abovementioned leaves, of the measures available in the Polish Labour Code adopted by the analysed companies that were reported as supporting caring attitudes in men, **flexible working hours and remote work** (in all the three companies) must be mentioned first. Both these measures offer an opportunity to combine care and work. While the former is used mostly to shift workday start and finish time, the later enables to work outside the office. More specifically, the respondents found flexible working hours helpful as they could leave and pick up their children from the nursery/ school on time, attend parents' meeting, go to the doctor's with their children or support their wives in looking after their new-born. Remote work was reported to support work-family management, particularly allowing respondents to do work and care simultaneously (in case of older children) or by turns. In the context of self-care, remote work is also believed to improve mental (by allowing to work from any location e.g. from the seaside) and physical wellbeing of the staff (as it gives more space for sports by saving time on commuting).

Remote work is a very good solution and allows you to find a way to develop your career and combine it with your daily chores. (...) it is definitely helpful for a parent who has to look after children, because it gives you a lot of flexibility. (Company1 / Carer)

A crucial role of the manager in the process of flexible working hours arrangement should be emphasized – it was reported in all the three companies that it is possible to unofficially alter working hours upon individual agreement with the manager.

The companies' own initiatives that introduce measures to support not only engaged fatherhood, but other aspects of care as well have been listed below:

- > **Equality/diversity and/or employees' representatives bodies** (all the three companies) – having a structure/body responsible for equality/diversity & inclusion

policy and where the employees' rights and needs may be articulated might make the problem of inequalities, men's health, men's caring obligations more heard and might facilitate the implementation of solutions supporting their rights, diversity and equality (including care);

- > **Additional leave systems** that include a day off for each employee's birthday (Company 1) and sabbatical leave (Company 1 and 3) – while the former is an additional day off granted in the month of each employee's birthday to be used for instance for self-care, the latter is a solution provided to long-tenure employees with an opportunity to take a break from the company, and allow self-care or provide care to others (partner, children, others);
- > **Training/educational/integration events** (all the three companies) – all the analysed companies organize workshops, webinars, trainings and meetings about gender stereotypes, parenthood, care, child raising, using WLB solutions, healthy life-style and integration events for children and their parents;
- > **Communication strategies** (all the three companies) – the investigated companies possess developed communication channels (e-mails, dedicated phone lines, online forums, guidelines for parents, online platform) where information concerning the available measures may be found and they adopted several communication strategies in order to promote paternity and parental leave as well as greater involvement of men in care. Whereas in the context of communication strategies Company 2 mainly focuses on showing the benefits of sharing parental leave by both parents (e.g. developing soft skills, preventing burnout and on a family level – creating deeper relations with children), Companies 1 and 3 communicate their openness to the necessity of managing family life and work or their support for taking up childcare-related leaves in a more general manner;
- > **Policy of 'one-to-one meetings'** (Company 1 and 3), the 'speak up, listen up' and 'open doors' cultures (Company 2 and 3) that give space for discussion and negotiation of one's private and business issues and where the employees are additionally encouraged to talk about their problems, to present new ideas to their supervisors, and discuss the issues connected with caring obligations and best solutions for them;
- > **Organizational culture of transparent communication, openness, cooperation and mutual support of employees** (Company 1 and 3) – the interviewed men mentioned receiving help from colleagues and understanding from managers who either took over their responsibilities and/or adjusted days off/leaves to their availability or proposed using specific solutions to allow them to combine work and care. Unfortunately, most of those solutions are mainly arranged informally, so men are not fully aware of their availability;
- > **Taking part in projects which promote caring attitudes in men** (Company 2 and 3) – two of the analysed companies undertake actions such as participation in projects on caring, fatherhood and caring men in order to promote engaged fatherhood, raise awareness about fathers' rights and parental leave and to support employees in caring for their dependents;

- > **Promoting male role models in caring attitudes** (Company 2 and 3) - providing positive role-models as an important tool in the development of engaged fatherhood. This measure provides an opportunity to observe to what extent other fathers are satisfied with their parental leave and how positively this period of time impacts their relations with children. In this context Company 2 publishes a newsletter aimed at all the employees with fathers' stories about their experience of parental leave and fatherhood, while Company 3 actively promotes taking up parental leave in the course of organized events (e.g. a panel on fatherhood on International Men's Day);
- > **Solutions facilitating return to work after maternity/parental leave or other longer leave** (Company 2 and 3);
- > **Flexibility in choosing unit/department/office** (Company 1) at any time to best suit employee's need not only results in saving time on commuting but also provides an opportunity to share care work;
- > **Directives for managers not to send emails late in the evenings** (Company 3) – in order to allow self-care and time for family/children/partner, Company 3 has advised managers not send e-mails to employees after 7 p.m.;
- > **Clear signal not to work when ill** (Company 3) - in order to allow self-care, Company 3 adopted a measure of clear communication when a staff member is ill in order to work efficiently.

2.5. Recommendations and ideas for action in WS 3

Recommendations for improving existing measures

- > Raise awareness of solutions for male carers, in particular about the infrequent modes of sharing of parental leave, flexible work schedules or part-time arrangements;
- > Promote benefits of taking parental leave for fathers, their partners, children and whole families as well as benefits for the company due to redefining their work relations in view of care and wellbeing;
- > Work with managers to disseminate information about male caring attitudes and the available measures but also in other ways to support such attitudes (for instance by observing working time, respecting weekends and holidays, promoting the speak-up culture and others); managers should not only inform about the available measures, they should also be role models, proactive in providing information, encouraging men to look for appropriate work-life balance solutions and to use them;
- > Show role models in men's engagement in care (not only fatherhood, but also e.g. being a caring manager) – fathers working in the company who took the leave are believed to be effective in breaking gender stereotypes and promoting engaged fatherhood;
- > Give voice in companies to women whose partners shared parental leave – explore the double perspective on sharing parental leave;
- > Build a clear and comprehensive communication strategy on care, work-life balance and men's engagement in care;
- > HR department should be proactive in communicating caring solutions for men e.g. on parental leaves;
- > Discuss the relations between gender equality and caring masculinities leaving room for debate on various initiatives aimed at women and men in the companies and on finding synergies.

Recommendations for new measures/actions to be implemented

- > Address/debate the existing social expectations towards mothers and fathers and work and family related gender stereotypes;
- > Develop tailored measures for men with caring duties, which would be implemented at the company level (e.g. related to care for the elderly, providing additional two-week father's leave, additional days for care leave);
- > Provide nursery/day-care centres on company premises; financial benefits for those using them;
- > Create space in the company for men to debate their engagement in care by e.g. encouraging the development of fathers' groups/networks, engaging fathers in parents' network, engaging men in networks focusing on wellbeing;
- > Widen the perspective on men's engagement in care: discuss the dimension of care related to care for the elderly as well as for the partner and family as a whole. The changing family situation and needs depending on children's age should be considered (not only families with small children);
- > Organize social events for families to meet in a relaxed setting, such meetings could further develop empathy and understanding when it comes to using measures related to care;
- > Join other external initiatives focusing on inclusion or care, task force gathering other companies engaged in those issues to exchange information, debate and look for new measures and solutions.

Recommendations for further studies / trainings

- > Trainings and workshops aimed at better preparing managers/team leaders to support men who want to reconcile work and care, with a focus on communication skills to build inclusive relations with employees based on security and trust, knowledge about current solutions, team management;
- > Explore and discuss how the experience of big international companies could be transferred or discussed in other types of companies, e.g. domestic ones, public institutions or smaller businesses, where employees cannot do remote work due to the nature of their work;
- > Explore other dimensions of care than childcare and self-care, discussing engagement of men in caring for their extended family, partner, friends, local community;
- > Explore experiences of women whose partners shared parental leaves;
- > Investigate men who did not decide to take a parental leave to explore further the barriers for men's engagement in care.

2.6. Reflection of the results

The overall extent to which caring masculinities are discussed and addressed at the company level has not reached its full potential, but there are marked, general tendencies to focus on in the context of transnational analysis. These are:

- > The male aspect of care is limited mostly to fatherhood and to a lesser extent – self-care in the context of wellbeing and health and care for partner/parents/wellbeing of their family/environment. Although the male breadwinner model has been challenged and a support for men's engagement in care has been discussed at the national and company's level, the company priorities remain connected to these aspects of caring attitudes.
- > Although international corporations in Poland may be perceived as pioneers in the development and implementation of measures enabling men to reconcile work and care, the scope of the measures is limited to the transposition of national regulations (in case of care leave), with only a slight improvement in the scope of their implementation (in case of flexible work arrangements) to reflect the company's values, CSR strategy or branding strategy and to compete with other companies. Gender experts / gender-equality bodies play an auxiliary and consultative role in the implementation of measures.
- > To better address the needs of various groups of employees, detailed data should be collected (e.g. divided according to gender).
- > Parental leave taken by men is still met with surprise from their colleagues. This illustrates a persistence of gender stereotypes and gender order embedded in cultural conditions which permeate the current attitudes and practices related to care.
- > Leadership style of managers is based on the overall companies' values and strategies. Yet, in practice, some managers are not convinced about the efficiency of newly implemented policies and measures (especially flexible working arrangements) which is also strongly linked to their management style based on direct control and limited trust to the members of their teams.

- > A balance between work and private / family life is of significant importance for employees, especially the younger ones or those in higher positions. Increasingly, they do not want to overwork, they demand a work-life balance, flexible work arrangements. However, work environment based on competition may still be observed.
- > Awareness-building actions aimed at changing the attitudes and practices among employees (both men and women) must be accompanied by trainings and workshops aimed at better preparing managers/team leaders to support men who want to reconcile work and care. The latter should focus on communication skills to build inclusive relations with employees based on security and trust, knowledge about current solutions, team management.
- > A need to link policies and measures supporting caring masculinities with a wider framework of gender equality. To challenge both the cultural and financial barriers preventing men from greater engagement in care.
- > Establishing bottom-up employee networks supporting men in their caring roles and promoting role models in the companies.