

POSTSCRIPT

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC POLICIES AND PRACTICES ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN GREECE

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Aim of this text was to assess and evaluate public policies on the reconciliation of work and family life in Greece. The methodology adopted was semi-structured interviews with experts and government officials on the issue of political reconciliation of family and professional life. Six interviews were conducted between July and October 2016. The interviewees were all women, with experience in the design and implementation or evaluation of public policies on gender and/or with a long-term research and academic involvement. All of them were contacted a few days before the scheduled interview and were given an outline of the subjects under investigation.

Key findings

Most interviewees agreed that when we talk about work and family life balance policies we must make a distinction between working time settlement policies (work leave, part-time work etc.) and policies regarding the facilities for dependent family members (mostly preschoolers and the elderly), such as nurseries, old people's homes etc. They pointed out that the emphasis must be given on the former, i.e. the creation of adequate infrastructure, such as care

services outside the home and not on flexible working time. When care for the children or the elderly is provided outside the home, there is no “hierarchy” between the working time of the couple, since the settlement goes outside family time. All interviewees agreed that there is a problem of differential treatment of workers in the private and public sectors.

Finally, most interviewees are in favour of policies that put the state more in the core of the responsibility for balancing work and family life. They also stressed that if we perceive reconciliation as a form of support towards women we do not serve the cause of gender equality. Policies should target men as well, relate to them and try to involve them more in family matters, not support women in order to combine work and family.

a) Planning, financing and implementing policies

Interviewees were asked to identify the key actors involved in the monitoring of relevant policies. Regarding private sector regulations, these are: the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, the Labour Inspectorate, which monitors the implementation of labour legislation and the Ombudsman who receives complaints for violations of working conditions. Regarding the public sector, jurisdiction lies on the Ministry of Administrative Reform and the Ministry of Interior through the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) that has a general responsibility for recommendations and proposals for legislation and policy implementation.

b) Criteria, priorities and needs’assessment

It was agreed that no such thing as “needs’ assessment” takes place for the adoption of policies. As several interviewees stated, the welfare state in Greece copied other models, rather than investigating the actual needs and taking steps in order to implement them. As a basic criterion remains the existence of funding, given the shrinking welfare state.

c) Overlapping and cooperation between policy makers

A major problem identified is vertical organization in the public service, where different sectors do not communicate with each other; therefore obligations and policies are not communicated efficiently. It was a common perception that horizontal policies in Greece are the future, probably providing the best solution on how to design and implement policies. Collaboration is at the discretion of the political actors, according to the synergies developed between political representatives. The administration is working and sends opinions and recommendations whenever requested; whether they are taken into account is something that seems to depend on each individual case.

*d) Coverage of needs of existing policies
and main shortcomings*

There was a unanimous belief that needs are not adequately covered. A greater emphasis should be given on infrastructures. Regarding loopholes in legislation, there are specific categories of workers and self-employed the needs of whom current legislation does not entirely cover. All interviewees insisted that one major problem that has not been properly addressed is the change of attitudes and the elimination of stereotypes regarding gender roles inside the family.

e) Progress that has been achieved in relation to the past

On this particular issue there was no clear consensus in the responses. The executives of Ministries felt that there is evident progress as can be documented in the proliferation of legislation regulating work and family life in the past decade or so. Nowadays, all Ministry of Labour policies take into account the gender perspective, and staff members are more informed and sensitized.

Another dimension worth stressing was the issue of women's relationship with the concept of work. By and large the majority of the population has adopted and accepts the concept of women's

participation in the labour market. Therefore, legislation must be adopted in order to regulate the obstacles that arise; reconciliation of work and family life is seen as a problem to be solved. There is also an evolution in terms of attitudes, perceptions, etc., and this makes it easier for inequalities to become very visible.

f) The impact of the economic crisis

There is a severe lack of resources for social policy due to extensive cuts in state welfare structures. Working relationships are becoming more flexible, and other non formal labor relations are imposed, which are unprotected and not subject to the existing legislative framework. At the level of values, claims related to gender issues have declined since they are considered to be a “luxury” in such harsh times.

Concluding remarks

The existing policies of balancing work and family life have facilitated women in the organization of their family and work life; they have not however assisted in overthrowing discrimination and stereotypes but rather have facilitated women to fulfill their double roles and functions. Although there is central planning in the field of social policy that effectively integrates the gender dimension, existing policies have not been able to prevent or have created another ‘discrimination’ between workers in the public and private sectors. The General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE) is a true focal point. However, many actions are scattered in various departments and agencies thus not making it possible to completely monitor and evaluate them. At the level of values, women themselves perceive their participation in the labor market as evident. However, there is a perception that the issue of gender discrimination has now been resolved. Although gender equality has become a pan-European value, there are still many difficulties in its full implementation,

that crash with an increasing competition and rapid changes in the organization and timing of work.

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