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Introduction

The “Ladies first!” project (2017-2019) aims to create a course that will empower teachers, trainers, and counselors to support women beneficiaries in order to gain the necessary stability between work and their personal life, especially during crisis. Seven partner organizations IASIS (Greece), IEKEP (Greece), ITG CONSEIL (France), Business Foundation for Education (Bulgaria), INSTITUTO DE SOLDADURA E QUALIDADE (Portugal), FVA (Italy), and CSI (Cyprus) work together to develop the “Ladies first!” project in order to define common strategies to address work-life balance for women in Europe.

The main target users of the project’s outputs are counselors/coaches and VET educators. The final beneficiaries are women, who face challenges with their work-life balance. In order for this course to be as useful and constructive as possible for the teachers, trainers, and counselors’ needs, each partner was asked to develop a national report, presenting the reality of work-life balance for women, as well as the status, suggestions and needs of the coaches and trainers, in each of the partner countries. For the purposes of each national report, each project partner was asked to conduct both desk-based research and field-based research based on a common report structure, questionnaire and interview guide and analyse the results during the period of December 2017 to April 2018. The main purpose of this report is to provide a collective picture of women’s status in each of the partner countries by combining the information as it was provided by each partner in each of the individual “National Reports”. In addition to this an EU report was also developed.

The purpose of this report is to present a summary of the main findings of the research conducted in each partner country as well as research contacted on relevant issues in the EU. For further information and details about National realities and research in the field, please check the project's Extended State of The Art Report, in English language, available at the English version of the project's website (<http://www.ladiesfirst-project.eu>).

Key findings of National Reports



1. Greece

Desk research

In Greece the gaps between men and women regarding labor market statistics has been frequently attributed to discrimination in absence of other determining factors. Generally, work-life balance (WLB) is considered as the most prominent reason for individuals not to pursue a top job (McKinsey & Leanin, 2015). However, women are underrepresented at every corporate hierarchical level as they seem to have fewer opportunities to advance.

Today, Greece has a progressive legal framework on gender equality in the labor market, but its implementation is partial and incomplete. Despite significant progress with regard to female participation in the labor market, deep-rooted practices of gender discrimination continue to undermine the implementation of gender equality objectives.

The economic crisis in Greece has had a considerable impact on employment relations and work conditions, which have affected women more than men. According to data provided by the Greek Ombudsman there have been cases of discrimination against women, particularly regarding conditions of pregnancy and motherhood needs. These categories were more at risk of unemployment or conversion of their employment into part-time status or of being generally discriminated against despite protective EU legislation.

In Greece, the *National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2016-2020*, which constitutes an initiative taken by the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (GSGE), comprises the following six policy areas: 1) social inclusion and equal treatment of women facing multiple discrimination, 2) combating violence against women, 3) labor market, work-family reconciliation, 4) education, training, media, culture, sports, 5) health and 6) equal participation of women in decision-making.

The General Secretariat for Gender Equality has been a partner of the Project entitled *"Innovation and Employability for Women, E-Women"* co-financed by the European Economic Area (EEA Grants 2009-2014). Its aim is to identify the current evolution of technology in relation to women's participation and sensitization, especially for young women, associated with ICT and employment (employment/employability and entrepreneurship).

In counseling practice, there are some available services/NGOs/associations who work with gender mainstreaming, gender equalities and women empowerment against discrimination

and abuse. However, it is worth mentioning that in Greece there were not many available published data on policies and existing practices and conditions of work-life balance for women.



The following are IEKEP and IASIS's policy recommendations:

- Monitoring new laws and policies on gender equality, including gender equality training programs for self-employed women.
- Gender equality training programs for private employers, business owners, heads of personnel departments of large companies and other professionals in order to challenge gender stereotyping in the recruitment of new employees and in the progress of existing employees.
- Implementation of vocational and training programs for unemployed women, including migrant women.
- Creation of networks of unemployed and employed women in specific sectors of the economy in order to promote synergies and empowerment.
- Incentives for private companies to adopt gender equality objectives, such as creation of databases on companies that respect gender equality and promote marketing and organizational strategies that encourage gender equality in the labor market.
- Specialized trainings and campaigns on sexual harassment addressing the needs and rights of women and men who work in the private and the public sector.
- Trainings about for the equal sharing of domestic and care responsibilities of men and women at home and dissemination of information challenging stereotypes and social prejudices about men's role in domestic and care work.
- Compulsory gender equality courses in primary, secondary and higher education.
- Vocational training of educator and counselors on gender equality about the glass-ceiling phenomenon: encouraging women to enter male-dominated professions, and for male students to enter female-dominated professions.
- Promotion of scientific research on the impact of the economic crisis on gender equality in the labor market.

Questionnaires

Out of the 33 participants 62.5% of participants evaluated coaching as extremely important in their practice. Participants further commented on the importance of work-life balance issues of women and coaching saying that *"coaching makes employees express their selves, stand with their own power, have more faith to themselves, take initiative"*, it further *"contributes to growth, development and learning of new skills"* and that *"coaching and its methodology meet the needs of my clients. It's a tool for empowerment and for learning through the experience"*.

Some of the key words on trainings or professional development in which they would like to participate relating to the field of supporting and empowering women towards work-life balance are: migration backgrounds of women, life- coaching, tools, goal setting and prioritization, stress-management, leisure time, psychological balance, women's rights in EU, trafficking, drug abuse and abuse in women, burnout syndrome, unemployment, conflict



management, social and gender roles, father participatory role, parental leaves, maternity protection, effective communication skills, presentation skills. Some participants also mentioned some techniques for delivering the trainings such as case studies, questionnaires/scales and non-formal activities.

Interviews/Focus groups

According to IEKEP, in relation to their participants' knowledge about trainings dedicated to women, they all referred to Research Centre for Gender Equality (KETHI), the Greek Public Institution that focus both on conducting social research on gender equality issues and also using this knowledge, to propose and implement specific policies, practices and actions to promote gender equality. Occasionally it provides specific trainings for counselors in several women issues. All participants have a significant experience in training with a special focus on gender mainstreaming issues.

All topics connected with employability were the most interesting for them. Specifically, self-assessment techniques (as they facilitate them to realize their own capacity) and aim planning (for organizing life and motivation) were considered to be the most useful.

Common areas for women's employability in Greece are in humanitarian professions (i.e. psychologists, social workers), nurses and caregiving professions, teachers, retail market, food and tourism. Another significant tradition for Greece is Women Entrepreneurship. Small and medium sized enterprises play a significant role in the development of the national economy in Greece and constitute one of the main sources for the creation of new job positions.

Since Greek trainers and counselors own a great favor to EU projects, these are the tools they consider important to use: 1) women Balance in different roles, 2) opening discussions about their professional expectations, 3) employers to be informed/aware about gender mainstreaming issues, 4) information about professional rights and obligations, and 5) burn out prevention.

All participants admitted that there is a huge need for additional trainings, also for update the methodologies and the tools that they used in the past.

According to their opinion the topics for these training should be:

- A. For women/ beneficiaries (to better understand their different positions towards personal and vocational life in order to achieve maximum balance and stability):
- Role description/ prioritizing
 - Empowerment/ Self Esteem
 - "Vision"/ Career planning
 - Time management



- B. For Trainers/ Counsellors (to gain new info and methodologies in their training process and to update their own capacity in order to facilitate beneficiaries with their working /personal life balance):
- Coaching Principles
 - Burn out prevention
 - Breaking my stereotypes
 - Modules dedicated to working /personal life balance

According to IASIS, the participants mentioned no training in the formal education framework and some training in non-formal counselling workshops however, there was no training specialization in the work-life balance issue. According to the participants observations women are acting as preserving the balance within the family, absorbing conflicts and they often face mental disorders, emotional problems, stress, low self-esteem and perceived self-efficacy possibly linked with all the above. According to them there should be a concrete definition of work-life balance aspects, meaning that a differentiation between work, family life and personal time is needed when examining the work-life balance issue. Participants found inadequate policies and supportive services for women in general.

Regarding the goals, when working with women counsellors stressed that the approach should be individualized and focus on the prioritization of life-goals, emotion management, self-perception, setting boundaries, assertiveness, sharing responsibility, becoming aware of the multiple burden as well as balancing between the different tasks, roles and parts of the self.

The specific training topics for professionals that were proposed by the counsellors are: soft skills, gender issues, discrimination and stereotypes, woman psychology and motherhood, and some referral information regarding legislation and networks.

2. France

Desk research

According to the French women were found, in 2017, to be more qualified but penalized in employment, earn on average 16% less than men on average hourly (all trades and private sectors combined), their careers to be penalized due to maternity, and more than three quarters of them to claim to be victims of sexism in their workplace.

In France, eight successive laws have attempted to impose professional equality between women and men in companies. In particular, there was the Roudy law in 1983; the law of 2011 which imposes 40% of women on the boards of directors of companies; and finally, the law of 4 August 2014 sanctioning companies that do not respect gender equality with



fines that can reach 1% of the payroll. The problem is that today 60% of companies do not respect this law. The state sanctioned only 0.2% of them, despite the shortfall: in 2016, only 116 companies were fined for non-respect of gender equality with a total bill of 613 000 euros.

These are the three initiatives that were identified: 1) incentive labels for equality: these women's networks also managed to convince businesses that enforcing professional equality was a real economic and strategic advantage, 2) deconstruct the fantasies of market feminism: this is denounced by researchers specialized in professional equality today. Equality between women and men has become elitist, and 3) promote the creation and support of Association initiatives such as "*Retravailler*" dedicated to helping women in France: these associations are financially fragile.

The following are ITG CONSEIL's policy recommendations:

- Enforcing the law simply
- Better communication with women
- Promote and commit to equality between women and men with Equality Labels
- Promote diversity in the scientific and technological sectors
- Launch a digital platform to connect middle and high school students and young people, who already have desires, professional projects with passionate women who want to engage as mentors to help them achieve their dreams

Questionnaires

According to the surveys there is a need in tools development and as well in putting people together, which mean that networking might be as well a good opportunity within the project. According to the participants, they would like some more transversal activities between VET and another local organisation, so a better-quality training, coaching and counselling offer could be provided. Regarding coaching in the work place answerers shows clearly that they are really involved in supporting women in the implementation of their decision. Regarding their working situation, they say clearly express they work alone and often don't get support from colleagues or hierarchy. In some ways they clearly express the fact they would like to work more in pairs and exchange about their everyday-life in the company providing training, coaching or counselling. Regarding innovation in their working method, it is clearly pointed out, a need in this field. The participants pointed out they work alone and feel sometimes alone in their everyday work. Education dimension is clearly important but some coaching and counselling "trainings" are not considered in France as education because objective is not to get a diploma. Training actions are more considered are Advising & coaching sessions, meaning to help people in decision process or/ and in implementation of this decision.

These are the key words the participants gave on trainings or professional development in which they would like to participate relating to the field of supporting and empowering women towards work life balance: qualifications recognition, updating competences,



importance of will, tools, coaching, support (financial or by network), psychological support, unemployment, conflict management, social and gender roles, father participatory role, parental leaves, care of children, maternity protection, family support, money support, and public financial support programs.

Interviews/ Focus groups

During the interviews the main topics of discussion were: work-life balance in women, lack of specific support and training programs, need for support (psychological and money), need for assisting women concerning care of children, lack of real measures to face discrimination, lack of mobility, lack of time, no recognition for specific stress of women, and lack of confidence for women to engage themselves.

According to the participants the most important topics for women's empowerment are: awareness of one's own value (self-awareness), self-esteem & self-presentation, knowledge of legal information and national programs about the topic, how to describe and explain your own experience and competences, time management, organization of priorities and activities/ Problem solving, ability to set goals that are feasible and reachable, stress management and relaxing techniques, conflict & risk management, communication including IT tools and social media, relationship and balance of roles in the couple/family, relationship with colleagues and team spirit, teamwork, collaboration, mutual learning and knowledge sharing, and how to be more ambitious and to set up ambitious goals (professional ones).

3. Bulgaria

Desk research

The Bulgarian legislation addressing gender equality is in compliance with the European legislation as the country is a member state. On national level the legislative acts that govern the equal treatment of women and men include the Constitution of Republic of Bulgaria, the Labour Code, the Social Security Code, the Discrimination Protection Act, the Social Assistance Act, the Employment Stimulation Act, the Domestic Violence Protection Act, the State Employee Act, and a number of other special and sector laws.

According to recent public discussions about the Istanbul Convention it was shown explicitly that there is crucial need for public awareness and education on gender issues in Bulgaria.



The current *National Strategy for Promotion of Gender Equality 2016 - 2020* that sets and regulates the relevant priorities and policies has been adopted by the Council of Ministers on the 14th, November, 2016. The main priority spheres are: to increase women's participation on the labour market and equal degree of economic independence, decrease of differences in remuneration and income based on gender, inspiring the gender equality in the taking

decisions processes, fighting with violence based on gender and protection and support for the victims, and change of the existing public stereotypes based on gender in the different spheres of public life.

"HeForShe" initiative of the United Nations for gender equality and the empowerment of women has been supported in by Schneider Electric in Bulgaria.

Questionnaires

In relation to training and professional development all of the participants indicated that it is very important to participate in trainings for their professional development and in work-life balance for women, and outlined it as very crucial and significant. The importance of coaching in their professional performance is appreciated highly by the participants.

As one of the participants has stated: "according to my observations coaching is one of the most powerful tools for self-transformation because it brings back the focus and the force in the hands of the coaches, avoiding any speculation." Another interesting and relevant comment comes from a counsellor who shared that: "in my practice, I am working with women with difficulties in keeping a balance between their personal and professional life, to be good mothers and wives, and at the same time professionals, or they lost a job because of pregnancy or giving birth to a child. They need to learn, to train a new adaptable behavioral strategy and sometime to learn how to get back control of their life."

The participants' suggested topics of training are: good time management and planning skills, abilities for application of stress reduction methods/techniques, readiness and flexibility, related to delegation of tasks to other people/child caring organizations, negotiation abilities (in communication with the partner/the employer), and understanding and acceptance of the individual value hierarchy and priorities.

The vast variety of key words about the topics for training and development shared by the participants indicates a serious need of trainings and supporting tools for the professional community.

Interviews/ Focus groups

According to the interviewees initiatives supporting work-life balance in women are not very popular in Bulgaria on authority level. Concerning the balance between private and



professional life in Bulgaria, few trainings and seminars are offered to teach people how to live in a balanced way. There have been no major initiatives and practices in the past years. The main efforts and work done is in the NGO sector. Most of the interviewees shared that they read in Bulgarian mainly the legislative documents and in English different tests, articles, materials connected to their work. As one of the interviewees said: “unfortunately there is a need of such materials but no or scarce availability.”

The need for educating/training women on work-life balance is indisputable for the interviewed professionals. The areas they underlined include: self-esteem, communication, positive psychology, life design, time management, assertiveness, and support and peer vision for women who feel difficulties to balance their work and personal life.

Among the identified specific training needs are: the use of storytelling, motivation of different clients, improving personal skills (self-respect, self-esteem, communication, dealing with conflicts), time management, use of real success stories; theories about decision making and assertiveness, how to help their client to understanding their values, setting priorities, leadership, and emotional intelligence.

4. Portugal

Desk research

A general reading to the current Portuguese legislation shows that the promotion of the, so needed and desired, conciliation between professional, family and personal life depends on the progressive active participation of men in family life and the participation of women in the public life, allowing both to invest their full potential in society. Work-life balance depends also on the elimination of professional segregation based on gender and the reduction of the gender pay gap that persists.

In Portugal and still in the force the “*V National Plan for Gender Equality, Citizenship and Non-Discrimination (2014-2017)*” integrates the main national policies towards the promotion of gender equality in all areas of governance, including a strong component in the activity of all ministries, providing an important means of cross-sectoral coordination for gender equality and non-discrimination policies on the basis of gender and sexual orientation.

Regarding gender equality, and more specific matters related to conciliation between personal, family and professional life the most recent legislation is grouped as follow:

- *Portuguese Parliament Parliamentary Resolution number 260/2017 of 30th November 2017:*

A resolution that recommends that the Government adopts measures to ensure the effective compliance of working hours and the reconciliation of work with family life.



- *Portuguese Parliament Parliamentary Resolution number 116/2012 of 13th July 2012:*
A resolution that recommends the Government to adopt family valorisation measures that facilitate the conciliation between family and professional life.

Many of the initiatives towards the promotion of the conciliation of personal, family and professional life are promoted by CIG and CITE in partnership with other public institutions,

like local authorities, or private institutions. These initiatives can be campaigns to raise awareness, training programmes, development of educational material, reports on good practices, etc.

Questionnaires

73% of the respondents affirmed that it is important for them to receive training in work-life balance for women. Half of them consider coaching to be “very important” in the context of their organisations.

In relation to training themes the participants indicated the following: law, men’s participation in family life, equal pay, conciliation policies, participation, time conciliation, gender segregation in labour market, women’s rights movement, gender equality and family life, parental leave, family life, flexible working hours, fixed working hours’ vs Free time, productivity vs 8 working hours, life-balance design, specific legislation about the reconciliation of personal and professional life (e.g. maternity leave, family support, absences from work for family support, etc.), soft skills, emotion management, interpersonal relations, emotional regulation, emotional intelligence, social pressure, motivation, social skills, career development and management, and decision making.

Interviews/ Focus groups

According to the interviewees work-life balance is deeply connected with equal pay and when approaching these subjects, people must be aware of the national, European and even international legislation regarding it. Regarding the development of educational material and resources, the interviewed indicated CIG’s “Education Guides for Gender and Citizenship” and the “Training Course on Gender Equality”. They also indicated that there is a need to educate women about the balance between work, family and personal life. It was also designated that that it would be good to invest on non-formal training especially making use of the pedagogy of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire, i.e. teaching the students to read the world so they can be able to transform it.

Regarding training and own professional development, most of the respondents did not have any specific training about work-life balance. Nevertheless, they consider important to have it because it is an issue that they sometimes approach with their clients. When commenting on the existing laws/practices regarding work-life balance, they mentioned that they do not have a deep knowledge of the subject.



Another important finding was that it was indicated that it would be important to educate parents to deconstruct progressively, from an early age, in order to be right social models. They suggested the following topics of training: time management (how to teach others to manage their time), the issue of beliefs (self-awareness for the topic), deconstruction of beliefs (mentalities), and methodologies of coaching (consider incorporating: "The powerful question" so that the person is aware of his reality).

It was emphasised that this type of projects should also be addressed at managers of human resources, or managers of companies, to who lays the responsibility to create measures that will allow women to conciliate their professional life with their personal and family life. According to the participants work-life balance is a men's problem too, because men also suffer social discrimination if they, for example, assume tasks that are traditionally attributed to women.

5. Italy

Desk research

In Italy, the most alarming data are related to the economic treatment, the discrepancy of opportunities between the two sexes shows no signs of diminishing while others European countries have started running towards equality and gaining in competitiveness.

With the Decree of 12 September 2017, Measures of conciliation, the Italian Government has completed the reference regulatory framework regarding facilitations and organizational measures focused on work-life balance. The decree addresses companies that undertake measures to support employees, both men and women, to reconcile family and work, with incentives of up to 110 MILLION euros for the two-year period 2017-2018.

There is a need of *"more flexibility, the part-time option, the set-up of company nests to allow women to better combine professional needs with family ones"*. This is what emerges from the survey "The work I would like" promoted by the portal "Cliccalavoro" to identify the obstacles limiting the female career.

Questionnaires

According to the survey nearly half of respondents believe that coaching is important in their work for the following reasons: it increases the level of individual awareness and helps interpersonal relationships, both essential elements for group work and for individual work performance at all levels, it is a guide for women who need help in making decisions, it is a non-invasive way of working, with limited but effective objectives, it is a working



methodology that allows the development of competence, it is fundamental (as an ongoing process of constant training), it is a great tool for working on specific goals, it enables collaboration and share of ideas, it addresses women's needs, it complements the psychotherapeutic work, and this type of support enables their training to be more productive.

According to the survey, the reasons for which women seek the services of professionals are: to get practical suggestions and advices of the working environment, both on the technical and emotional side, because they want to be listened, to get support on empowerment and advices on self-realization, to get support in coping with a critical situation, to get help to

reduce the level of anxiety, to learn how to work on being more detached/objective, and to get help in becoming more aware of themselves.

So as a consequence and as indicated by FVA the professional should: be able to create familiarity, be a solid reference point, be empathic and tuned, take into consideration of the characteristics of the person, respect the patient's time (achieve the goals gradually), adopt non-rigid protocols and procedures (should be flexible and tailor the support to the patient's needs), have a proactive role, understand the real problem, and not rush the clock.

Interviews/ Focus groups

According to the interviews 80% of the respondents didn't receive any kind of training on how to interact with women and contribute to their empowerment and raising of awareness and knowledge on the specific topic/issue. 40% of the interviewees are not aware on the existing practices promoted by the government of their country in relation to gender mainstreaming and coaching, specifically addressing women and work-life balance. 70% of the respondents do not use informational material addressed to work-life balance (for example, regarding women's rights, obligations, etc.). All of the respondents believe that there is a need to educate/train coaches, counsellors, educators, and trainers on how to coach and empower women on work-life balance.

According to the interviews the most important topics for women's empowerment are: awareness of one's own value (self-awareness), awareness of one's own abilities, self-esteem, capability of reflecting on personal experiences, time management, organization of priorities and activities/problem solving, ability to discard less important things and learn to be less perfectionist, ability to set goals that are feasible and reachable, importance of learning to say no, ability to live emotional bonds with a good degree of psychological independence, stress management and relaxing techniques, conflict management, change management, resilience, empathy, communication and dialogue, psychoeducation, abuse/gender violence, relationship and balance of roles in the couple/family, relationship with colleagues and team spirit; teamwork, collaboration, mutual learning and knowledge

sharing, relationship between woman technology (social network, iperconnection, smartphones, etc.), awareness of privacy rights (not being over contacted).

According to the interviewees these are the topics that can improve the skills of professionals working with women in managing the balance between personal and working life: knowledge of regulations, conventions and active facilities for women's support, create a network of cooperation and support among women in the same situation, knowledge of aid structures, collaboration and involvement of other family members involved, experiment on oneself to find the work-life balance, awareness and knowledge about diversity and culture on gender identity, methods to raise awareness also from an emotional point of view, methods of analysis of strengths and weaknesses, methods oriented to women empowerment, methods for managing skills, mind-set and behavioural habits, tools for organizing and managing time, work and family activities; Planning and strategy tools, knowledge sharing and mutual learning between professionals, supervisory groups, constant professional updating, and knowledge of the new professions.

6. Cyprus

Desk research

In Cyprus the identified legislations dealing with equality between men and women, in terms of wider regulation of matters affecting the two groups and also in the field of employment are: *Law on Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Professional Plans and Social Insurances (L. 133(I)/2002)*, *Law on Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Employment and Vocational Training (L. 205(I)/2002)*, *Law on Parental Leave and Force Majeure Leave (L. 47(I)/2012)*, and *Law of Protection of Maternity (L. 100(I)/1997)*.

In Cyprus, the Ministry of Justice and Public Order has implemented for the period 2014-2017 the *National Action Plan for Equality between Men and Women*. The evaluation of the implementation of the Action Plan 2014-2017 indicated a number of areas in need of improvement. In order to do this the state is in the process of formulating a new Action plan for the period of 2018-2021. The new Action Plan (2018-2021) according to the Minister of Justice and Public order will have the following priorities: 1) effective promotion of equality between men and women/ Administrative reform, 2) update/Improvement of the legal framework, 3) equal representation in decision making positions, 4) eradication/Prevention/Handling of violence against women, 5) financial empowerment of women - Eradication of poverty, and 6) eradication of stereotypes and social prejudices.

In addition to the work of the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the Ministry of Energy, Commerce, Industry and Tourism implements a programme for the promotion of female entrepreneurship. The programme falls under the Operational Programme "*Competitiveness and Sustainable Development*" (2014-2020).



Apart from these are some available services/NGOs/associations who work with gender mainstreaming, gender equalities and women empowerment against discrimination and abuse: “The Hub” Cypriot Women’s Leadership Network, MIGS: Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, Cyprus Gender Equality Observatory, National Machinery for Women's Rights - Ministry of Justice and Public Order, OWAAT One Woman at a Time, BRW CYPRUS-CYPRUS FEDERATION OF BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WOMEN, ACM Council on Women in Computing, UNESCO Chair in Gender Equality and Empowerment at the University of Cyprus, and Cyprus Women’s Lobby (Network of 16 organizations and NGOs).

The following are CSI’s policy recommendations:

- Development of family friendly initiatives at the workplace and raising the awareness of the organizations and employers on these issues.
- Promote and increase the employment, progression and preservation of women, mainly in the scientific field, technology and engineering.
- Diversity and Inclusion training for managers, HR and personnel specialists in order to gain the necessary competencies to successfully manage and support not only women but all personnel towards having a better work-life balance.
- Better policies at supporting women’s employment in order to alleviate the conflict between home and market activity.
- Provide better parental leave, more flexible hours in work and financial support to parents in case of a child’s birth or a family member’s serious illness that requires the support of one or both of the spouses.
- Reinforce the employment and retainment of skilled workers with children, both male and female.
- Raising of public awareness on gender equality issues such as stereotypes and social prejudices as well as the lack of knowledge and sensitization on the part of women and men.
- Better measures to be taken to rise the involvement and support of the under-represented groups.
- Elimination of negative stereotypes and attitudes and mainstreaming society for a just cultural, political and economic life.
- Promotion and provision of training seminars and workshops on knowledge and skills acquisition for professionals, on a systematic basis, working with women towards having a better work-life balance.

Questionnaires

In relation to the importance of coaching and of receiving training for their professional development, and on work-life balance for women almost all participants rated is as very important indicating clearly that it is a requirement for them.

In relation to the importance of coaching in their organization/private practice these are some of the answers they gave: “I consider it extremely important due to what it has to offer”, “most of the clients that come to my office have the need of empowerment therefore it is crucial for professionals to have constant access to training methods in order



to help the public”, “in my organization (University) we use basically teaching, seminars, tutoring and personal coaching to facilitate women (and students in general) to develop their personality in general and their skills (hard-skills: academic and soft-skills: socioemotional) at the highest level of their potential. Coaching, therefore, is one of the more powerful tools we use to reach this goal and modeling is also a great facilitator in this effort”, “coaching can serve well the life-long learning experiences.”, “it enables people to become autonomous easier”, “coaching can help employees to develop and learn new skills under the direction of experts”, “it's one of the organisation's priorities since it allows for professional and personal development”, and “coaching provides the right guidance and support.”

The big variety of key words that was given by the participants in relation to topics of training and professional development in relation to work-life balance in women indicates their willingness and need for development in this particular area.

Interviews/ Focus groups

Most of the participants mentioned that the main policies and laws they are aware of, relative to the topic of discussion, are in relation to the maternity leave of women at work, and equal rights. They mentioned that it would be very important for the government to provide better policies and initiatives supporting women to achieve work-life balance. They also mentioned that it would be very important and helpful for them to receive training and gain more knowledge in this specific topic.

In relation to material development most of the participants said that although it would be important not to use any informational material addressed to work-life balance. One of the participants mentioned that links for/and contact numbers are usually helpful when these resources are trustworthy. The participant mentioned also that the same goes for online platforms, open educational resources and APPs.

The areas the participants indicated that there is need for educating women on work life balance are: stress management, anger management and conflict resolution, on how to live a happy life, nutrition and happiness, time management, nutrition and happiness, on all the different forms of abuse, self-awareness, boosting self-confidence, empathy and compassion to themselves and others, and how to succeed in an interview and in a job environment

According to the participants Cyprus is in need of educating/training coaches, counsellors, educators, and trainers on how to coach and empower women on work-life balance. They are also in need of support and empowerment.

The areas the participants indicated that there is need for educating/training coaches, counsellors, educators, and trainers on how to coach and empower women on work-life balance are: empowering a multicultural group of women, time and stress management skills, balancing work and life support, educate both men and women on legislation and

gender in terms of work-life balance in an equal and open-minded way, and raise their levels of compassion and empathy, and discrimination and sexual abuse.

The participants placed a lot of emphasis on the importance of providing empowerment and support on work-life balance not only for women but also for men. Most of the participants argued that it would be important for both men and women coaches/professionals to be present in seminars and workshops in order to promote equality and healthy standards.

Key findings of EU report

As it was indicated in the Eurostat (2016), men have higher employment rate (72%) than women (61%). It is worth noticing that in a large majority of Member States it was observed a significant employment rate increase between women with children and men. Another important finding in the report on equality between women and men in the EU (European Union, 2018) is that although there are policies and measures in the EU and its Member States that support gender equality, women still remain the main carers of elderly and children and the main contributors to housework. According to the report on equality between women and men in the EU (European Union, 2018), part-time work is an important factor that keeps women attached to the labour market especially the ones that they become mothers. But its major drawback is that it contributes to the existing gender pay gap. As it was indicated in Eurostat (2015), women seemed to have higher risk of exposure to social exclusion and poverty and as a result to this, their children and families to be negatively affected. This was due to higher concentration in part-time work, the reduced earnings, and career gaps that were connected to caring responsibilities and make many women economically more dependent on the state or their partners.

In EU a number of legislative instruments has been identified dealing with equality between men and women, in terms of wider regulation of matters affecting the two groups and also in the field of employment:

- Equality and non-discrimination at work: Directive 2010/41 (European Union, 2017), Directive 2006/54 (European Union, 2017), Directive 2004/113 (European Union, 2017), Directive 79/7 (European Union, 2017), Council Directive 2000/78 (EurWork, 2011)
- Part-time workers: Council Directive 97/81/EC (EurWork, 2011)
- Health and safety: Council Directive 89/654/EEC (EurWork, 2015)
- Information and consultation: Council Directive 2002/14 (EurWork, 2009)
- Working time: Directive 2003/88/EC (EurWork, 2012)
- Posted workers: Council Directive 96/71/EC (EurWork, 2018)
- Temporary agency work: Directive 2008/104/EC EurWork (2012)

In EU the following initiatives and programs have been identified in relation to the women's work life balance:



- *Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 (European Union, 2015)*: according to this initiative the main objectives are the following: 1) increasing women’s involvement in the labour market and combining work and family life, 2) reducing gender pay, earnings and pension gaps and thus fighting poverty among women, 3) promoting equality in decision-making, 4) combating gender-based violence and protecting and supporting victims, and 5) promoting gender equality and women’s rights across the world.
- *EU Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (Ioannides I., 2017)*: taking into consideration the flows and lacking of the Gender Action Plan for 2010-2015 (GAP I) in accountability, institutional leadership and capacity, GAP II follows and builds on the GAP I. GAP II wants to ensure the physical and psychological integrity of girls and women, to endorse the economic and social rights of them and to empower them, to reinforce their voice and participation, and to shift the institutional culture in order to deliver more effectively on EU commitments. As indicated in the Plan, growth in gender equality in society is linked with growth in gender equality in work. Also through public policy and the right legislation men and women can be equally perceived as workers and caregivers at home. Public policy has an important role to play in order to bring down structural barriers to gender equivalence.
- *G7 Roadmap for a Gender Responsive Economic Environment (European Union, 2018)*: The Roadmap focuses on particularly on policies that can support women to participate in the labour force, involve in entrepreneurship, become empowered economically and in this way to reach full and equal participation in society. Its main objectives are talking the gender inequality aspect of poverty and eradicating gender-based violence.
- *Sustainable development in the European Union - 2017 monitoring report on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals’ (SDG) in an EU context (European Union, 2018)*: This report marks the beginning of Eurostat’s regular monitoring of progress towards the SDGs in the EU. It focuses on the areas of education, gender-based violence, employment and leadership positions in relation to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”.

In a study made by Brown, C. & Yates, J (2018) a multi-dimensional individualized intervention was used to help midlife women accomplish a satisfying work-life balance. As a result of participating in the above coaching programme (Brown, C. & Yates, J, 2018), all participants designated a strong increase in positive emotions, stated feeling higher levels of resilience, mentioned that were able to reframe their feelings and perceptions in relation to their work-life balance, and gain new coping skills. In relation to experiencing negative thoughts and feelings, the program helped them to have a more objective thinking process.

In a study made by Bussell, Joy & Bussell, J. (2008), it was indicated that a big percentage of midlife women with senior professional positions choose to resign from their work after having children. This study focused on how coaching can be linked with the retention of women in the workplace, transitional issues and their implications. As it was indicated in the study coaching offers effective support during transitions, help in the preparation of



the individuals for the development of leadership skills, and can support women to return to work in a new dual role. An interesting finding was that, according to the employers, there was an observed “danger period” where they were losing valuable women from work after their maternity leave and when the support from coaching has stopped.

According to a report on the coaches’ experiences when supporting clients who are going through transformational change (Hanssmann, E., 2014), in order for the coaches to be effective and successful when providing support to their clients they need to be authentic and genuine, be able to listen holistically, provide meaningful companionship to their clients

and be capable of combating the fears that surround personal change processes. Skills that were identified as very important for the coaches to master are to recognize the readiness of their clients to change, to capitalise on natural openings for change, and form better understanding of the longer-term effects of the coaching outcomes. Another important finding in the research was that the coaches should be secure in themselves, and have the need to constantly improve themselves as key instruments of change.

According to activists and NGO experts the participation of women in public spaces, especially in political decision-making, justice, and research, still needs to improve. It is very important to enhance access to training for women and implement it with consistency. It is also very important to recognize that this is a long-term process in shifting the role of women to the one of actors. Also in terms of funding, despite significant increases in recent years, the overall funding resources for gender equality and women’s empowerment actions remain inadequate (Ioannides I., 2017).

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Links

[CIG - Comissão para a Cidadania e a Igualdade de Género](#)

Committee on Citizenship and Gender Equality

[CITE - Comissão para a Igualdade no trabalho e no emprego](#)

Committee on Equality in labor and employment

[Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos](#)

Contemporary Portuguese Database

[INE - Instituto Nacional de Estatística](#)

Statistics Portugal

[Pordata](#)

Database of Contemporary Portugal

[DGERT - Direção-Geral do Emprego e das Relações de Trabalho](#)

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