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## Methodological introduction

### **Introduction: the aims of the new project**

(S1) WLB is meant to be a continuation to the previous project dealing with work-life balance and the role of men and fathers. It offers the unique opportunity to improve our data gathering and to dedicate some time to data analysis. The purpose of this project is to go further in the analysis of a field which we have already explored last year, and to be able to construct a transnational database of comparable results. Here the focus is clearly put on comparability: we aim at producing similar sets of data in each country, so that we can systematically compare both the types of policies aimed at fathers in each setting and the experiences and needs of fathers in various countries.

(S2) Let me first remind you on the various methodological steps which are comprised in WLB:

“1) Overview (European diagnosis): during this phase, an inventory of national, regional and local policies directed to men and fathers will be made, on the template that was already developed in the existing project. For this overview, comparison of welfare states situation will be taken into account and the existing report will be extended so as to include information in well delimited areas such as the role of political parties, but also the influence of welfare state development. Each national partner will conduct additional research in their own country (France, Spain, UK, Belgium and UK, Sweden) on existing practices. The results of this research will be integrated in the transnational report

2) Focus groups: during this phase, each partner will conduct discussion groups with fathers and men to study their opinions, wishes and behaviours, and detect possible hurdles /opportunities for policies aimed at these two target groups.

3) Analysis for dissemination: the results of the consultation and focus groups will be scrutinised by a team of international experts and will lead to a final report analysis and publication.”

Let us browse systematically each step, so that the methodology is very clear for each deliverable.

## I. The transnational inventory

### (S3) Aims:

The aim of this phase of the project is to collect the results of existing policies and good practices in the promotion of men and fathers in work / life balance. These policies and practices can come from a number of different actors: public, private, NGOs. They can be identified at various levels, and a given local setting can offer men and fathers possibilities resulting from national policies as well as local policies. In our transnational inventory, it is important that we distinguish between these levels as well as between the actors who promoted and designed them. As we have seen, major differences can exist among countries regarding the relevant policy level: it depends both on the history of the welfare state as well as on the political environment in which these policies have taken place.

### *Targets*

It should be noted that policies and good practices for men and fathers may not have them as their explicit primary target: for instance, the city of Paris implemented a policy of augmenting childcare facilities which aimed explicitly at facilitating work/life balance. The target, unspecified, encompasses both mothers and fathers. In fact, many policies target *parents* no matter their gender, and should however be included in the inventory. Some policies may have been designed primarily for mothers and then be extended to fathers also (such as parental leave in some cases). On the contrary, some policies target specific groups of men and/or fathers: migrants, unemployed... If such is the case, please specify the target of these policies.

### *The context in which policies were elaborated*

Parenthood and gender relations are issues which are subjected to contradictory views from the part of different political actors such as elected representatives, politicians, NGO activists and public intellectuals. As we said, the historical context plays a great part: depending on the kind of welfare state – or lack thereof – at various points in recent history, such issues as childcare and the sharing of domestic tasks have been met with various solutions.

Therefore, in order to assess the current trends regarding policies and good practices in the promotion of men and fathers in work / life balance, it is important to understand the debates surrounding the creation and implementation of such policies. Such information may be found in the numerous reports which are being written on gender and family policies, as well as in the press – of course informal discussions with actors involved in the promotion of men and fathers in work / life balance is a good way to get this information. The press is also a good place to look at. And you may always use formal interviews or informal discussions which you had with insiders of these policies.

Last but not least, the economic context of policies aimed at men and fathers is very important. Work-life balance, as we found, became an issue when the participation of women to the labour market became generalized. In France, female employment outside the home is inversely correlated to the number of children and the household income. On the other hand, the UK report showed very clearly that the participation of men is also inversely correlated to the household income. This challenges preconceptions about the class structure of gender relations with regards to work-life balance: it is not true in all countries that the more deprived household display a low level of participation of men and fathers to domestic tasks.

### *Good AND bad practices (policy failures)*

It seems important to highlight good as well as bad practices in the field of local policies directed to men and fathers. Most of the time, inventories of policies focus on good practices only, and are based on the belief that these good practices can easily be transferred from one local situation to another. But an overview of bad practices, or, if you prefer, policy failures, can be very useful too, especially when the reasons for failure can be highlighted. Some policies may be efficient when applied to a certain type of target group, but not to another, because of cultural or sociological reasons. For example, a policy which might be efficient in a liberal type of society may be less effective in a very patriarchal one. Therefore, one policy which has failed in a specific situation might well prove to be efficient in another. An inventory of both policy successes and policy failures would therefore be particularly useful, mentioning in each case the possible reasons for success or failure.

#### **(S4) Content:**

The expected deliverable is a report of at least 10 pages, answering precise questions about policies. Each team will receive a template for the completion of the report – which will largely draw on the one elaborated for the previous project – and will be expected to fill it exactly. For the purpose of comparison, it is important that each aspect should be documented, even if the answer is that it does not exist or is not significant. We will send each team a specific template which acknowledges the results obtained so far, so that the final inventory incorporates the outputs of both projects.

- The core of the inventory is based on the description of work-life balance policies: are they national, local, European? What was the context in which they were elaborated?
- It is important that we understand who were the actors involved in the process of the elaboration, testing, implementation, evaluation of the policy: politicians? Employers? Schools and childcare facilities? Father's NGOs? Churches? Etc...
- It is always very interesting to see whether a policy has been evaluated.

We ask teams to include detailed examples of one policy which has succeeded and one which has failed (please describe in details who was involved in its creation, its implementation, how it went and why it failed or succeeded).

## **II. The Focus Groups**

(S5) We chose a methodology for the completion of Focus Groups (or Forums of participation) which encompasses two different steps: interviews on the one hand, groups on the other hand. Both phases allow obtaining different results. Generally speaking, an individual interview is efficient to gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective experience of the interviewee, his representations and attitudes. On the other hand, Focus Groups allow for exchanges among participants and leave room for contradictory arguments and discussions. It can also make participants collaborate in a common reflection about what kind of policies could help them solve some problems they encounter – as we saw it successfully done with the Belgian Focus Groups. Focus Groups are helpful in order to understand the relationship between the representations of the individual and those of the group. Both phases should involve the same participants. Each team may “recruit” its participants in the way which is found most suitable: working with NGOs, as was successfully done by the British team, proved to be particularly useful. However, since only one FG is should be completed, its composition should follow some rules of diversity: men working in public as well as private organisations, men of different age groups as well as men working at different levels

in their organisations. Diversity of situations (divorced fathers, migrant fathers) is also welcome.

### **(S6) Individual interviews**

Individual interviews will come first, so that their results could be introduced in collective discussions. Another benefit of beginning with the interviews is that all participants will already have thought about the topic and will therefore have reached more in-depth conclusions before the FG takes place.

Each team will receive the same interview guide. It is not the same as a questionnaire, since it allows a semi-structured discussion with the interviewee, in which personal aspects can be developed without the interviewee being interrupted by the need of hurrying to the next question. Each interview must be recorded for further transcription, but each team will also receive an interview restitution grid, which should be sent back to the CIR when it has been filled with the main results of each interview (in English).

### **(S7) Focus Groups**

Based on the results of both the inventory and the individual interviews, each team will receive a list of themes which should be brought up during the discussion. However, a Focus Group allows some flexibility, since themes may be brought up by participants themselves during the discussion: in this case, it is important that the dynamic of the discussion should be preserved, as opposed to structured group interviews. A lively debate can be a bit “messy”, but this is not a problem since it may significantly improve the results – but not too messy, otherwise transcribing will be a nightmare. Usually, it is recommended that two researchers should conduct the FG: one who introduces new topics and keeps a close watch on the time, the other who interacts with the participants and pushes them forward in their discussion (even by pointing at contradictions in the participants’ discourses if any). Guidelines will be sent to all teams, but please remember that I and the CIR will be happy to answer any methodological question.

After the FG has been completed, each team should send back a Focus Group restitution grid summarizing the main results.

## **III. (S8) Analysis of the results**

It is important that both interviews and Focus Groups should be transcribed in their original languages – we will be able to use quotes from whatever languages we understand, and with the help of the teams it is always possible to translate very relevant excerpts.

An analysis grid will be sent to the teams which will help them synthesising the main results of the research.

Each partner is welcome to write a contribution for the final publication based on these results. The results obtained by each team will also be submitted to a comparative analysis.