



## FACILITATING FAMILY LEARNING ON WORK & LIFE BALANCE

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[www.family-learning.eu](http://www.family-learning.eu)

# BEST PRACTICES ON WORK & LIFE BALANCE

*Personal reflections of the employees who have benefited from the family-friendly measures at their workplaces*

**2010**

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**The collection "*Best practices on work & life balance*" has been developed by the international partnership:**



**Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson,  
LT**

[www.lygybe.lt](http://www.lygybe.lt)



**Social Innovation Fund, LT**

[www.lpf.lt](http://www.lpf.lt)



**European Partnership, LT**

[www.europartner.lt](http://www.europartner.lt)



**Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, FI**

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The collection “**Best practices on work life balance**” includes 32 interviews with family members who benefited from family-friendly measures at the workplace. Its main aim is to encourage family members to contribute for themselves in implementing family-friendly measures at their workplaces.

This brochure is one of the results of the Grundtvig project, “**Facilitating family learning on the work-life balance (Family)**.”

**Project aims** to develop an innovative approach to family learning on work-life balance. It seeks to develop the capacity of the employees to lobby for implementation of family-friendly measures at workplaces and as a result, to remain active on the labour market.

**Project’s target groups:**

- Learners - family members having problems in work and life balance;
- adult educators - family consultants on work and life balance;
- Adult education organisations, trade unions, workers’ unions, family associations, NGOs, interested in using the prepared training material for their clients.

**Project outcomes:**

- **State of Art Review** analysing the cases of implementation of gender equality planning at workplaces on work & life balance. It creates a base for defining the competency profile of a family consultant, who works with family members having problems to reconcile work and family life.
- The multi-language “**Collection of Good Practices**” based on personal reflection by the employees who have benefited from the family-friendly measures offered by their employer:
  - **brochure “Best practices on work & life balance”**
  - **set of video-clips on DVD**
- **E-Handbook on DVD “Family learning on work & life balance”** with innovative training modules for family learning on work-life balance. It aims to help learners to develop their social and civic competences in the area of gender equality, family-friendly workplaces and work-life balance.
- The “**Guidelines for Family Consultants**” how to organise training on work-life balance for working family members and to encourage their active involvement in implementing family-friendly initiatives within their workplaces.

**Main results:**

- 160 family members trained on work & life balance issues;
- 50 family members received personal consultations on work & life balance;
- 400 families encouraged for self-learning on family-friendly measures;
- 16 family consultants prepared to work with families having work & life balance problems;
- 70 adult educators and other social partners acquainted with the role of family consultant on work & life balance.

**More information about partnership, results and outcomes may be found on the project website: [www.family-learning.eu](http://www.family-learning.eu)**

## 1. RETURNING BACK TO WORK AFTER THE MATERNITY LEAVE, WHILE HER HUSBAND STAYS AT HOME WITH THE BABY

*Presented by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Finland*

*Interviewed person – Päivi L., female*

*Type of presentation of interview is* - by summarising interview by author

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
- child care services
- flexible work arrangements



Päivi is a 38-year old university graduate from the Helsinki University. She works as a research and development manager in the Finnish financial sector. She is a first-time mother of a 5-month-old baby. Regarding her age, Päivi is an ‘old mother’, which is becoming a typical trend particularly among well educated Finnish women. It is normal for them to have their first child when they are 30+. The women establish their career first and then start their family.

Päivi returns back to work when her maternity leave is over. She divides the parental leave with her husband who stays at home with the baby. During the summer she takes two months as parental leave. Her husband used the total number of paternity leave when the baby was born, altogether 3 weeks, and now he plans to stay on the parental leave for 5 months.

Päivi’s family leave arrangement is not very typical in Finland, since only 2 % of the fathers use more than the assigned 3 paternity weeks. It is, however, possible that this arrangement becomes more typical in Finland, with women’s increased levels of education and better chances at work.

Päivi is strongly dedicated to her work and intends to pursue her successful career. But, with the baby at home, she thinks her working rhythm will change. She works the normal 7.5 hours per day but no more extra hours. She is lucky for being able to do so, because her employer does not favour a long work-hour policy.

Päivi’s employer is “family friendly”. They have an Equality Plan which is taken as self-evident. The employees have a possibility to work shorter hours and telework from home. They also have a family-friendly arrangement when the children fall suddenly ill due to flu or other children’s illnesses. The employer arranges a baby sitter so that the employee/parent can go to work or work from the home, while the baby sitter takes care of the sick child.

In many workplaces parents’ absences due to their children’s illnesses can be a big problem, particularly when the parent is in a key position. Increasingly, women hold key positions in their workplace. According to the Finnish law, a parent can stay at home with their sick child for 3 or 4 working days. In many workplaces the lost salary is compensated for the employees based on labour contracts but not in every workplace.

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The need for flexible childcare services, particularly in emergency situations, has created new kind of entrepreneurship in Finland in terms of baby sitting services. These services are offered either to the families or to the business companies who offer the services to their employees as a bonus. One of the leading child care provider is Kodinavux. They have established contracts with more than 400 business companies who offer baby sitting (and other household services, e.g., cleaning) for their employees. (www.kodinavux.fi).

Since Päivi's employer is supportive of parents with young children, she is confident that she will manage to combine her demanding work and family life. Work has always been important for her. And now with the baby, work is even more important by giving a possibility to channel her capacity as an ambitious and well-educated person. With good planning and structuring her working time, she hopes to spend more 'quality' time with her child and the family.

Päivi hopes that together with her husband they can use flexi hours, teleworking and occasionally part-time work in order to be with the child as much as they can. As a modern two income couple their model is equally sharing parenting (ESP). This means that they are committed to become better at working together as a team in all aspects of running their home, raising the children and earning the money.

## **2. A FATHER OF A NEWBORN BABY SHARING HIS PARENTAL LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS WITH HIS WIFE**

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*Presented by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Finland*  
*Interviewed person – Antti A., male*

*Type of presentation of interview is - by summarising interview by author*

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company

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Antti A. is thirty-six years old and a father of a five months old baby-boy. He works as an administrative officer for The Miessakit Association in Helsinki. The Miessakit Association is a non-governmental expert organisation for men. The aim is to support the foundation for gender equality among men, to strengthen family well-being from men's perspective, and to develop the structures for solidarity and mutual help between men furthering these aims (www.miessakit.fi).

His wife is thirty-one years old and works as a head of finance in a company operating within the hotel and catering industry. Presently, she is on maternity leave taking care of the baby. She will also stay home during the parental leave, although it is possible for the parents to share the leave. Usually it is the mother who uses the entire parental leave period, and this is also the case in Antti's family.

Antti has been working for the Miessakit Association since 2004 and is strongly devoted to his work. The Association has gathered as its support structure a nation-wide contact person network operation in 20 localities in Finland. After becoming a father Antti has become more conscious of the economic situation of the family and plans to complete his studies at the university. The Miessakit Association is a non-governmental organisation and operates on support money mainly from the Finnish Slot Machine Association (RAY).

Antti was on the paternity leave for 3 weeks after the baby was born. He plans to use an

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extra paternity month (about four weeks) after his wife has completed the parental leave period.

In Finland, the parental leave begins once the four month maternity leave ends. Parental leave, which lasts about six months, can be used by either parent, and also be shared. Practically, the parental leave is used by the mothers; only 2 % of the fathers share the parental leave.

A great number of fathers (80 %) take the paternity leave, which ranges from 1-18 days (on average 14-15 days). During the paternity leave fathers can stay at home with the mother during either the maternity or parental leave.

Most mothers (87%) use at least part of the child care leave after the parental leave. The child care leave means a chance to stay at home to look after a child until the child turns three. By this arrangement, the children are about 1.5 to 2.0 years of age when they start in an external child care. Very few men use child care leave, but Antti plans to take the leave for about 2 months at the end of 2010.

Antti said that it was self-evident for him to be a participant father and use at least the 3 weeks when the baby was born. He is looking forward to using the extra paternity month when his wife returns back to work so that he can be with the child at home independently. According to him, the fathers easily fall into 'mother's assistant' role.

His workplace, the Miessakit Association, has been very supportive in his family related decisions. Most of his colleagues have taken the paternity leave and many of them have used the extra paternity month. He admits that the absence might cause some problems in a small work unit as theirs, but the problems are manageable. His workplace can be regarded as very family-friendly.

Antti feels that the newborn baby has brought him new perspective to life and put his value preferences into a new order. Based on his own experience, he warmly recommends all fathers to take part in their parental obligations. When fathers stay near the everyday life of their families, it strengthens the family structure and its dynamics.

### **3. A BUSINESS WOMAN WITH A DEMANDING WORK LOAD AND A MOTHER OF TWINS OF WHOM ONE HAS SPECIAL NEEDS**

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*Presented by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Finland*

*Interviewed person – Nina K., female*

*Type of presentation of interview is - by summarising interview by author*

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
- child care services
- other type (work-related medical rehabilitation)

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Nina K. is a forty-one year old mother of two boys living as a single parent in Helsinki. She has a degree in business administration and works as an assistant controller and main accountant in a multinational pharmaceutical firm. Her work load is demanding with lots of responsibilities and hectic dead lines in Helsinki and company's HQ.

Nina's two boys are identical twins, now 10.5 years of age. One of the boys has special

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needs due to Cerebral Palsy (CP). Marcus cannot walk without some help and uses a wheel chair for moving around. Niclas and Marcus form a tight team together as is typical for many twins.

After the boys were born, Nina stayed at home for about a year combining the maternity and parental leaves. She returned back to work as soon as the parental leave was over. The boys' father used a minimal number of the paternity leave days. Ten years ago men were less active than today in using their paternity leave entitlements.

In Finland, a parent with a child with special needs can reduce working hours (weekly or daily) until the child is 18 years of age. With the so-called normal children, the parent can shorten the working hours until the end of the child's second school term. The shortening of working hours is subject to arrangement between the employer and the employee. The lost salary is partially compensated for the parent.

This arrangement has never gained much popularity in Finland. This was also the case with Nina; when she returned to work, she started working full-time. The reduction of working hours was never an option for Nina. She describes herself as an achiever rather than a 'motherly' person. She was eager to return to work, having a challenging career and a good salary also helped her make her mind up to return to work.

At her workplace, Nina has found it easy to speak about her family. Her boss and colleagues have been very supportive. However, no special arrangements have been made for her, and she has not asked for them. Nina's answer is typical for her to question whether it has been hard to balance her work and family life. She says she is a strong woman and feels proud of being able to combine both a demanding job and a demanding family.

Work means a lot to Nina. Seeing other adults during the day is refreshing. She is happy to share work-related issues with her colleagues and receive good advice from them and help them with their problems. Nina values her work very much and thinks she is good at it.

Nina has managed her work and family duties partly due to the high-quality child care system in Finland. When she returned to work, her sons started in a full-time municipal day care. They also took part in preschool education before the primary school. It was helpful for Nina that during the first and the second grade the boys participated in guided morning and afternoon activities. This arrangement enabled Nina's full-time working.

Research has shown that an early start in a high-quality day care can be beneficial for a child's development and well-being. Nina fully agrees with these findings. Her two sons have benefited from high quality childcare services, which mean that the children's groups have been small and interactive, the environment has been stimulating, and the days have not been too long. Often Nina's parents have picked up the children so that their days have not been extended.

Occasionally Nina feels stress and fatigue particularly when doing bureaucratic paper work for getting compensation for Marcus' special needs. However, Nina is quite optimistic about the future. Now that the boys are bigger, she feels her 'care load' has become lighter.



## 4. JOB ALTERNATION LEAVE - A NEW INSPIRATION TO WORK

**Presented by Finnish Institute of Occupational Health, Finland**

**Interviewed person – Eija L., female**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by summarising interview by author

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- career break
- other type (job alternation leave which is a kind of a sabbatical)



Eija is fifty-five years of age holding a degree in medical (nursing) sciences. Since her graduation, she has been actively working outside the home for 33 years except for two maternity leave periods in the early 1980s. In 2004 she started as a researcher and developer at the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH).

FIOH is a world-famous research and specialist organisation that promotes health and safety at work and the well-being of workers. The number of permanent personnel is approximately 600, and about 200 people are working on different projects. FIOH is a progressive workplace with an Equality Plan and a staff well-being program. The Institute also invests on the life-long-learning of its personnel. During 2008, an extensive mentor programme was carried out. (www.ttl.fi.)

Eija's work duties include age management activities with the purpose of lengthening of the working careers of older workers. This issue is vital in Finland due to rapid ageing of the population. The Finnish Government has established the extension of Finn's working careers as one of its targets. Therefore, new research is needed about the ageing processes which are investigated in the Life course and work -team where Eija works with seven other team members. She is the only member who is located in Tampere, about 200 kilometres from Helsinki, while other members work in the Institute's HQ in Helsinki. This means a lot of travelling for her.

During 2009, Eija took a job alternation leave which is a kind of a sabbatical. The job alternation leave is based on law, and it must always be agreed with the employer first. When the attitude at the workplace is positive, other issues can be negotiated such as the duration of the absence and whether the leave is kept in one or several periods of time. The leave may last anywhere between 90 to 359 days, and may be kept in one or several periods of time. These periods must be agreed in the job alternation agreement before starting the leave.

The work history of the employee must be at least 10 years before the start of the job alternation leave. In this regard, Eija was well qualified with her 33 year-long work history. A peculiarity of the job alternation leave is that an unemployed jobseeker must be hired as a substitute with the salary paid by the same employer. The person hired as the substitute should primarily be a young person, a long-term unemployed or a person who has recently completed an academic or vocational degree.

At FIOH, the attitude about Eija's request for having a career break was very positive. Both her boss and her team members were supportive. They thought it was a brave idea. FIOH has much experience of the job alternation leave, since many people have used it

according to the FIOH's HR manager Monica Hostio.

Eija had good reasons for taking a break. Her mother's serious illness had made her consider her life preferences and she wanted to have more time caring for her. Another reason was her husband's sabbatical from his professorship at the Tampere University of Technology. Eija planned to enjoy some 'quality time' abroad with him. In addition, finding more time for her personal interests outside the work played a significant role in her decision.

Researches made on the reasons why people apply for a sabbatical are very similar to the ones mentioned by Eija. Mostly people want to recuperate from the hectic rhythm of work and spend more time with their families, friends and hobbies. Some, like Eija, want to take care of their ageing parents. The majority of the employees (70 %) taking the sabbatical are women working in people-intensive work roles, such as teachers, nurses and service people particularly in public sector organisations.

Eija enjoyed her sabbatical very much, but she was also happy to return back to work. While on leave, she kept some contact with her team members and read e-mails regularly. Otherwise she felt relaxed from her work duties. She was very satisfied with her substitute who could compensate for her absence so that the team members did not need to do her work. For her, the best aspect of the sabbatical was more time with her family, hobbies and studying. It was also important to take some distance from work routines and get new inspiration. The career break will help her to stay longer at work, which is one of the aims of the job alternation leave.

## 5. FLEXIBLE SHARE OF PARENTAL LEAVE BY FATHER AND MOTHER

*Presented by Technical University of Dortmund, Social Research Centre, Germany*

*Interviewed person – Bastian P., male*

*Type of presentation of interview is* - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
- flexible work arrangements
- other type (Public support from the municipality to find a child minder for day care)



Bastian P is 34 years old, is married and is the father of two children (Felix, 2.5 years old, and Charlotte, 6 months). He has been working as a research associate on a fixed contract, full-time basis for 2 years at the TU Dortmund's Sozialforschungsstelle (social research centre). His wife is also a scientist and works at another university for 30 hours a week.

Bastian P was self-employed and was predominantly involved in developing and offering

management training when his first child was born. This allowed him to spend the majority of his working hours at home and share the parental leave with his wife<sup>1</sup> during the first 8 months of his son's life. "The law, with the possibilities to plan parental leave, encourages fathers to take paternity leave because they hardly suffer any pay losses and paternity leave helps form an intense father-child relationship," Bastian P said.

Both Bastian P and his wife wanted to continue working once they had children, and they made the decision around the time of the birth of their first child that they would employ the help of a childminder<sup>2</sup> at an early stage (at the age of two months). Bastian P: "We think that this is the best type of care available for children, because there is a very strong emotional bond between the childminder and the child. Furthermore, flexible working hour patterns can be set that would not be possible with nursery schools or day care centres. We employed our childminder when Felix was two months old so that he could form a bond with her early on and see her as a stable part of his life, and therefore separation anxiety was never an issue."

For the first few months, the childminder was only there for a few hours a week, and after the fifth month the hours were increased to the following weekly plan: 3 days for 9 hours a day, and 2 days for 5 hours a day. They found the childminder via the Youth Welfare Office of the Dortmund City Council and an agency. Together with another childminder, she looks after up to two other children in an apartment that they rent solely for the purpose of childminding.

At the Sozialforschungsstelle where Bastian has been working since April 2008, he researches and advises individually for various aspects of the working world. He has fixed-term contracts which extend depending on the number and the length of the projects he acquires. He believes that in academic fields, it is almost impossible to take extended time out from your career unless having a permanent contract.

Due to their positive experiences, when their second child was born the couple decided to only take a short time out from their careers, share the parental leave and also employ the childminder early on. After the birth, his wife took a three month break from her career, because during this time she breastfed her daughter. Bastian P then took over the childcare in the following two months. Both parents currently work, and whilst they are at work the childminder takes care of the children.

At the time of this interview, Bastian P had just returned to work following his paternity leave after the birth of his second child. Over the next two months, he will work full time before then taking a further two months paternity leave. With regards to looking after his daughter, this second time of paternity leave is not absolutely essential because the childminder will have completely taken over caring for the children during the time he is at work. However, from a pedagogical and family point of view, it is very important to him to have further intensive father-child time during this period of parenthood and therefore reduce the hours that the childminder works.

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<sup>1</sup> For the first child, two thirds of the person's salary who takes parental leave is paid by the Elterngeldstelle (German office for parental leave pay), and for the second child three quarters of the salary is paid. A total of up to 14 months parental leave can be shared. This parental leave model that has been available to mothers and fathers in Germany since early 2007 is enjoying increasing popularity, especially amongst fathers.

<sup>2</sup> Childminders (Tagesmuetter) are persons – mostly women - who provide day care for one to five children in their private home often together with their own child/children. They can be hired privately or can be provided by the Youth Welfare Office of the municipalities. For childminders an official training is required by law.

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Bastian P. feels that the alternating parental leave model is perfect for all concerned. He describes the discussions with his employer when his second child was on the ways as follows: “Right at the beginning of my wife’s pregnancy, we already developed a working-hours pattern that best fulfilled our family and career requirements. I then proposed the work model to my employer. My plan involves two two-month periods of paternity leave within the first 8 months after the birth of our daughter. My employer was very pleased with the plan. It is important to plan in good time so that the projects that are to be carried out during the paternity leave can be appropriately delegated. During the first two months of the first phase of parental leave, I did actually have to go to a couple of meetings where nobody could stand in for me, but overall I didn’t have much to do with work during my parental leave. The project clients were informed about my paternity leave and I planned my projects in such a way that my colleagues hardly had to cover for me and the project work didn’t suffer. Because it was only for two months, I was able to continue with my projects afterwards and wasn’t so out of touch with work as somebody who for example had taken six months parental leave all at once.”

His employer also offers flexible working time arrangements and part-time but he doesn't think much of a reduction in working hours, because he expects that he then generally would work more hours than stated in the contract.

The employer could also benefit from the model if the project work was continued by the person responsible for it. Bastian thinks that it is essential both parties be considerate in this model. “Just as I hope that my employer respects my wish to take parental leave and grants it, it also goes without saying that I also participate in important meetings that cannot be postponed that only I can attend as the person responsible for a particular project that takes place during the parental leave period.”

He also thinks that the close father-child relationship that can be built up during parental leave is a further plus point. He can recommend this model to all fathers because the bond with the child becomes incredibly strong in those months. This effect is also noticeable with regards to the relationship with the older child who also profits from the parental leave taken for the younger child. The number of hours that the childminder looked after the older child was also reduced during this time so that the younger child also spends more time with the parent on leave.

For him as a father, the model offers a good work-life balance. “During the parental leave, you can take a break from daily working life and then start back with new energy. After I had been at home for two months, I looked forward to being in the office again and now that I'm back in the office for a while now, I'm looking forward to spending time at home with my children again.”

## 6. CHILDREN ARE WELCOME AT THEIR PARENT'S WORKING PLACE

**Presented by Technical University of Dortmund, Social Research Centre, Germany**

**Interviewed person – Silvia S., female**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- flexible work arrangements
- other type (Possibility to take children to work in case of child care emergencies; training of the manager regarding family-friendly policies)



Silvia S. is 33 years old, married, and has a three-year-old daughter Viviane. She has worked in the housekeeping department at the Hotel E. for about ten years. Her responsibilities include cleaning the hotel rooms and restrooms, restocking the mini bars and other maintenance duties inside and outside the hotel. Before the birth of her daughter, Silvia worked 30 hours per week. Unlike in many other fields of work, there are no fixed working hours because the workload depends on how busy the hotel is. Hence there is more to do on some days of the week than on others.

Silvia decided early on in her pregnancy that although she would like to devote a few years exclusively to looking after her daughter, she would definitely like to return to her old job afterwards but with reduced working hours. Her employer promised her that she could come back to work after her parental leave. While she was off work, her supervisors made friendly enquiries as to whether she wouldn't prefer to come back to work earlier than planned. Whereas Silvia had originally planned to take three years off before going back to work, after only two years – also due to the fact that her employer wanted her back – she felt a strong desire to make an early return to work at the hotel.

However, it proved to be very difficult to organise childcare for her daughter. All the day care centres in the area were full, which meant that her daughter couldn't be accommodated in this way. As a result, when Silvia first went back to work it was important that she only worked at weekends, since at these times her husband was able to look after their daughter. Her employer was delighted at her decision to return to the housekeeping department after just two years, and also agreed to the weekend solution. Silvia was employed on the "400 Euro" basis.<sup>3</sup> Her employment contract is for a total of 49 hours per month, which she works in the respective month according to the workload. In

<sup>3</sup> In Germany, a "400 Euro job" is a special type of part-time employment. A job qualifies such if the employee earns no more than 400 Euros per month from the job, including all special payments. Special tax and social insurance rules apply to jobs of this kind. The rules state that the person who takes a 400 euro job receives the pay agreed with the employer without any deductions, i.e. their take-home pay is the same as their gross pay. In addition to the wage, the employer pays lump-sum social security contributions and a lump-sum wage tax. There is no limit on weekly working hours for 400 Euro jobs. The only important thing is that monthly earnings do not exceed 400 Euro.

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order to be able to respond more flexibly to her employer's needs, she has now entrusted care of Viviane to her parents. This allows her to work at the hotel during the week if needed. "I can't just say that I'll come in every Sunday or every Tuesday, that doesn't work. The amount of work for me to do in the hotel depends on how busy the hotel is."

However, it keeps happening that Silvia S's parents are unable to step in and help, with the result that no care options are available for her daughter when she should be going to work. Her employer offered to let her bring Viviane to work with her in these special circumstances.

Last year the hotel manager attended a training course as part of the municipal initiative called "FamUnDo" (Familienbewusste Unternehmen in Dortmund – Family-conscious businesses in Dortmund). The initiative aims to give impetus to businesses in Dortmund to make jobs more family-friendly for their employees. The course consisted of five thematic workshops and two to three individual in-company consultancy days. Along with many other steps for improving working conditions, Silvia S's supervisor acted on advice to formalise the informal arrangements for a better work/life balance, which had been put in place, such as being able to bring a child to work in exceptional circumstances. Thus, Silvia reported that at joint staff meetings, her boss had now officially offered all employees in the housekeeping department the option of bringing their children to work in special circumstances. This agreement was viewed as being advantageous for both sides – for the employer and for the employees.

Silvia told us that there was a great willingness among her female colleagues to be mutually supportive and understanding, when it comes to problems with achieving a work/life balance.

"If someone has something planned or has to go for an appointment, then a colleague will say 'come on, I'll stand in for you.' So it works really well between colleagues, too. My colleagues also understand when someone brings their child to work with them. It's not like you're alone with your child, there are always a few errands to run in the hotel, or you have to go and fetch something, or you come into contact with guests, and your child is involved despite everything. That's a good thing. It's much easier to get to talk to the guests – then they ask my daughter things like 'so who's this then?', and that's also really nice."

It is important for Silvia that this model doesn't become the rule, that it doesn't replace "normal" childcare. It's there for emergency situations, such as when the kindergarten is closed or, as in her case, on exceptional occasions when the grandparents aren't available to look after the child and there is no other option. "If I were to take my child to the hotel with me every day, at some point it would feel like I was just dragging her around and I don't want that. She should play and be with other children."

Her daughter enjoys being at the hotel, which Silvia sees as another crucial factor that enables her to go to work. She says that Viviane takes a lively interest in her mother's work and wants to help, for example with restocking the mini bars. Viviane feels accepted, Silvia says: "Everyone talks to Viviane too, they have fun with her. I have to say, children are really welcome here."

For Silvia S, the fact that she can take her child to work with her is very important: "Otherwise there's no way I would be able to work so often during the week and I couldn't help out in at such short notice like I sometimes have to do."

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## 7. WORK/LIFE BALANCE WITH WORK TIME ACCOUNT

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**Presented by** *Technical University of Dortmund, Social Research Centre, Germany*

**Interviewed person** – *Britta W., female*

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- flexible work arrangements
  - other type:
    - public support from the municipality to find a child minder for day care;
    - flexibility of the child minder;
    - agreement with employer before maternal leave.
- 

Britta W. is 33 years old, married, and has a one-and-a-half-year-old daughter.

She works as a trainer at a large German bank, where she trains bank employees in sales and customer contact. The training comprises of individual coaching, workshops, seminars and team sessions.

Her husband also works at the bank but performs other tasks in customer service.

Before Britta went on maternity leave in September 2008, she worked full-time as did her husband. From the outset, she wanted to take about a year off work following the birth of her daughter and then to go back to her job but in a part-time position (19 hours per week). “We can’t both work full-time because neither of us ever used to get home before seven or eight o’clock in the evening and there’s just no way that would have worked with a kid. Also it’s easier for me to work part-time because I don’t look after direct customers whereas my husband is responsible for a customer base and so it’s even harder for him to work part-time.”

Early in her pregnancy, Britta told her bosses that she was expecting and shortly afterwards had a meeting with them to discuss her future role. She told them how long she wanted to take off work and what she had in mind for the time after that. They quickly reached agreement that Britta could come back to work for 19 hours a week after taking about one year’s leave to look after her new-born child.

After their daughter was born, the family set about finding a suitable childminder who would take care of the child in the periods when Britta was at work. There was no question of finding a child day care facility as the couple lived in a rural region which has a limited range of care services available for small children. They found a childminder<sup>4</sup> via their local Youth Welfare Office (Jugendamt). It was agreed that care would be provided on three days per week – two full days and one half-day. Their daughter would be looked after at the childminder’s apartment.

Shortly before Britta resumed her job at the bank after her parental leave, another supervisor suggested she set up a work time account. This was a concept that other

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<sup>4</sup> Childminders (Tagesmuetter) are persons – mostly women - who provide day care for one to five children in their private home often together with their own child/children. They can be hired privately or can be provided by the Youth Welfare Office of the municipalities. For childminders an official training is required by law.

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employees at the bank made use of but which she hadn't been aware of before.

According to the concept, the agreed 19 hours per week are multiplied by 52 weeks and leave days and public holidays are deducted from the result. The working time that is calculated in this way can then be used/worked flexibly over the course of the year. Britta gladly took up this offer. She sees it as being ideally suited to her situation as it allows her to be flexible with her weekly working hours according to her family obligations. Thus, for example, she can work more than 19 hours one week, then reduce her working hours the following week to allow for family activities.

This working time model also fits in very well with her professional activities since she is relatively free to decide when the training sessions take place.

“We have a four-month plan, which means every four months my boss gives me a list of tasks which have to be completed in that period. I then directly approach the persons concerned and schedule appointments with them. As she has agreed fixed days with the childminder who looks after her daughter, she arranges her appointments accordingly so that her daughter is cared for. Because the childminder is flexible, in special situations she can also fall back on her outside the agreed childcare times.

However, there is a requirement that the weekly working hours are distributed fairly evenly over the year. “The assumption wasn't that I would finish work in June and not have to go to work for the other half of the year. That would be bad for the department's planning.”

Britta has been working with a work time account since November 2009. She is very satisfied with the work time model as it helps her achieve a work/life balance:

“It works a treat. My daughter has had a few problems with bronchitis, but I haven't once needed to ask the doctor for a sick note for myself and I've always managed to sort things out.” She also sees it as a positive decision to find a childminder to look after her daughter. She is very satisfied with the childminder, who she says is reliable and flexible. She says her daughter is in good hands and feels happy there. Looking back, she wouldn't do anything differently.



## 8. CHILDCARE BY COMPANY KINDERGARTEN

**Presented by Technical University of Dortmund, Social Research Centre, Germany**

**Interviewed person – Sven K., male**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- child care services
- flexible work arrangements



### Background information<sup>5</sup>

Dortmunder Stadtwerke (DSW21) is a municipal company that is responsible for public transport (bus and rail) and for the development and marketing of real estate. The company employs around 1,900 people. DSW21 has assigned other tasks to subsidiaries and affiliated companies. One of these is Dortmunder Energie- und Wasserversorgung GmbH (DEW21), a company with around 1,000 employees, which supplies the city of Dortmund with natural gas, electricity, heat and water.

With a view to improving work/life balance, in 1990 DSW21 developed the idea of building a child day-care centre through an employee initiative. This idea was implemented in 1993. The company put up EUR 1.7 million for the construction costs and built the kindergarten on the company site. DSW21 sought a partnership with AWO (“Arbeiterwohlfahrt” / welfare association),<sup>6</sup> an organisation, which met the conceptual ideas concerning full day-care and flexible opening hours. The two companies signed a partnership agreement which sets out the fundamental terms of their partnership along with their responsibilities. DSW21 finances half the costs of a teaching position, pays for maintaining the building and site, and assumes 3% of the personnel administration costs and 9% of the operating costs. As with most other child day-care centres, all other costs are borne by the municipality and via parents’ contributions.

An agreement was also reached concerning the rights to childcare places. Up until 2008, a total of fifteen childcare places were available to the children of employees of DSW21 and DEW21, who can also make use of the facility. This number has now increased to twenty. There are a further fifty unreserved places which are allocated by the funding institution.

Sven K. is 44 years old, married, and the father of two children (aged 6 and 9). He has worked at Dortmunder Energie- und Wasserversorgung GmbH (DEW21) since 1991. Since 2000 he has worked as operations manager in the electricity grid business. His wife works part-time (20 hours a week) as an assistant to the management of an energy and information technology company.

When their first child was born, the couple’s career plans were that Mrs K, who worked full-time before the birth, wanted to stop work for a good two years after her first child and then start working again part-time. To make sure that childcare would be available; they started looking for a kindergarten place shortly after their first child was born. They investigated the options in their local area, and visited some of the childcare centres. Since Sven works at DEW21 and is therefore able to register his child at the company kindergarten “AWO/DSW21 and DEW21”, this facility was also on their list.

<sup>5</sup> Information supplied by the deputy director of the child daycare centre “AWO/DSW21 and DEW21”.

<sup>6</sup> AWO is a decentralised German charity which in addition to caring for people with disabilities and senior citizens also operates child daycare facilities.

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Since the company kindergarten is supported both financially and in terms of services (building and site maintenance) by DSW21, this kindergarten seemed to offer greater possibilities than other childcare centres did. All in all, there were many aspects that persuaded the family to choose this kindergarten.

The main deciding factors were the fact that the company kindergarten offers full-day places and a hot lunch, and that it takes children younger than 3 years old (from four months). In 2003, when their youngest child was registered, these care facilities were not very common yet this was a very important concern for the couple as otherwise Mrs K would not have been able to meet her employer's working hour's requirements.

The kindergarten is open from 7 a.m. until 4.30 p.m. and in special cases until 5 p.m. "You can say that I need childcare until 5 p.m., I've got another appointment – but you have to let them know in advance." In addition, Sven's employer introduced flexible working hours a number of years ago to improve work/life balance. This means that he has relative freedom to decide what time he starts work in the morning and what time he finishes, as long as his working time account stays within certain limits.

Registering for a childcare place was an uncomplicated process via the Dortmund Youth Welfare Office (Jugendamt) and they received confirmation very quickly that their child had been allocated a place. At the same time they pay exactly the same nursery fees that they would pay for any other kindergarten. Sven thinks it positive that it was possible to sign their child up in the middle of the kindergarten year – not at some fixed time, as is often the case. This enabled Mrs K to fulfil her wish to return to work after about two years. As they are very satisfied with the standard of childcare, they took less parental leave with their second child than they did with their first child. They sent their son to the company kindergarten when he was just 16 months old, and he has been very happy there from the start.

Apart from its opening hours, Sven sees many other benefits in the company kindergarten "AWO/DSW21 and DEW21":

Compared to many other centres the building is spacious and takes environmental considerations into account, the grounds are large and there is a water playground. There is also an exercise hall on the site which offers a lot of space for sports activities. The number of support personnel is somewhat higher than at other centres due to the employer's financial support, and many activities are offered such as English lessons, ballet, practical courses, and workshop activities and so on.

He sees it as positive that colleagues' children also attend the kindergarten as this strengthens cooperation. "Then everyone knows each other, it makes the network stronger. You see people when they're taking their children to and from the kindergarten, the children know each other too and go to each other's birthday parties."

Children who formerly attended the kindergarten but left to start attending school can visit the kindergarten for full days (e.g. during holidays or at other times when the school is closed). Children and parents like to make use of this opportunity.

The kindergarten is situated on one of DSW21's sites, which means that employees who work on the site and whose children attend the kindergarten don't have to make the extra journey to a childcare centre.

Sven is very satisfied with his decision to send his children to the company kindergarten

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and would make the same decision again.

## 9. POSITIVE ABOUT DISABILITY

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***Presented by Merseyside Expanding Horizons Ltd, Great Britain***

***Interviewed person – Chris W., female***

***Type of presentation of interview is*** - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

***Type of services provided by the employers:***

- care services for elderly or family members with disabilities
  - flexible work arrangements
  - other type (support for disabled employees)
- 

The employee works as a member of a small team in a local charity, not for profit organisation. The organisation provides information, training and support to organisation for disabled people in Merseyside at the North-West of England, this helps support disabled people effectively, efficiently and sustainably.

For the last 7 years Chris has been employed full-time as a Development Worker. Her standard hours of employment are between 9am – 4.30pm and her contract includes the provision to occasionally work out of hours, including evenings and week-ends to attend meetings and training events. The organisation allows her a degree of flexibility which enables Chris to begin work from 7am onwards if she chooses, and also undertake work from home. She reports directly to the Chief Executive, who in turn is accountable to the Board of Trustees, responsible for the overall governance of the organisation.

Chris is herself a disabled woman, who has to rely at all times on either sticks or a wheelchair to get around. Access issues and the ability to drive are vital to her in carrying out her everyday work both in the office and when undertaking visits to other organisations and attending events and training sessions.

Central to Chris's ability to continue in full-time employment has been the organisations commitment to accommodate the needs of the employee, doing all they can to ensure the employee has the necessary support to maintain a positive work and life balance. Although not formally recorded the organisation has developed a strong culture which recognises the needs and demands of family life outside the work-place.

This has been of real importance to Chris as she has a 22 year old disabled daughter with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder [ADHD] to whom she provides care and support. In addition she has six grand-children for whom she provides some childcare support.

This workplace culture meant that when Chris had to be off work for a period of 3 months due to her disability, not only did the organisation accommodate this by granting extended paid leave but also planned a staged return to work for her. The organisations approach was focused on, "what will work best for you and enable you to successfully return to work". The outcome was a successful return to full-time working.

As a result of her disability Chris's daughter can from time to time display erratic and uncontrolled behaviour. When these crisis occurs and Chris receives a phone call from home, with the agreement of the organisation she is able to leave work immediately, "drop

everything” and go and provide support to her daughter and family in dealing with the situation.

The understanding between employee and employer is that she will return to work as soon as possible, and where this is not possible she will continue with work from home. When her daughter was pregnant and required intensive support from Chris, with regular hospital appointments, which included 8 days in labour; the organisation facilitated flexible leave arrangements, providing a period of “grand-parent leave” during childbirth.

When Chris’s eldest daughter was in hospital for 5 weeks and she had to assume childcare responsibilities for her two grand-daughters, 3 and 5 years of age, the organisation responded in a positive manner. They provide a period of extended leave during the Christmas holidays to enable Chris to provide full-time childcare; when she returned to work she was able to negotiate flexible working hours to ensure that she could pick up both children from school and nursery during the afternoon.

The key to the success of this ‘unwritten policy’, which has enabled Chris to maintain full-time employment and appropriate support to her family, despite a number of real personal challenges, has been a commitment throughout the organisation to a culture that recognises the importance of promoting a healthy work and life balance.

## 10. A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS, FLEXIBILITY, CHILDCARE AND TRAINING

*Presented by Merseyside Expanding Horizons Ltd, Great Britain*

*Interviewed person – Polly I., female*

*Type of presentation of interview is* - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
- child care services
- flexible work arrangements
- training/retraining of employees, who return to labour market after a break due to family reasons

Polly currently works as a full-time HR Adviser for the Individual Restaurant Company in their head office in Manchester. She has been with the company for 8 years, starting out as a receptionist in one of their busy city centre restaurants.

When Polly became pregnant six years ago, the company enabled her to work more regular hours during the latter stage of her pregnancy by switching her role to office based tasks. On her return after maternity leave she worked 3 days a week, eventually returning to work full-time and transferring to the company’s main office. During this time Polly was offered the opportunity to take up training, including a ‘Training for Trainers Course’ in order to take up a new role in the company. “When I became a single parent 3 years ago I had to think about how I was going to manage my busy life as the mother of a 3 year old, and continue to develop a career in order to support us.”

With the support of the company, who adopt a policy of enabling a positive attitude towards work and life balance for all their 2,000 employees in diverse locations across the

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UK, Polly was able to re-negotiate her hours of work. This has meant flexible working arrangements which allow a regular opportunity each week to leave work early and collect her daughter from school and take her to ballet lessons, and the flexibility to ensure that; “I never miss the chance to attend important events in my daughters school life, including concerts, plays and sports day. This flexibility extends to ensure that I can be at home with my daughter if she is ill, and recently when the school was closed due to bad weather I was able to work from home for a week”.

To ensure that she can maintain full-time work Polly has also been able to take advantage of excellent childcare support in her local school. The ‘Breakfast Club’ run by qualified staff is available from 7.45am each morning, and later in the day the ‘After-School Club’ ensures that children can be well looked after until 6pm, providing, snacks, drinks and a stimulating programme of activities. As a result of being able to maintain a balanced lifestyle Polly has been able to further develop her career, Again with the support of the company she has recently completed a professional qualification [ CPP ]; the course was paid for by the company, Polly was able to attend on day release one day a week and had an additional 5 days paid ‘study leave’. As a result of successfully completing the course she was promoted within the company and received a pay rise as a result of taking on new responsibilities.

“This has worked brilliantly for me and my daughter, the company recognise the relationship with family is important, there’s no taboo here in talking about your family life. There are lots of employees with young children at all levels in company and the attitude is to be as positive as possible in enabling people to maintain a balance between work and family life; and by doing this it ensures that the company are able to retain many of their best staff”.

## 11. CANCER CARE

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***Presented by Merseyside Expanding Horizons Ltd, Great Britain***

***Interviewed person – Maureen K., female***

***Type of presentation of interview is -*** By summarising interview by author.

***Type of services provided by the employers:***

- flexible work arrangements
  - support for employees affected by long – term illness
- 

Maureen has been employed full-time for the last 6 years as the Family Support Team Leader at St Mary’s, a large Hospice employing over 100 staff and 200 volunteers. She has lived in the area for over 10 years and has family nearby.

In September of 2008 she was taken ill and admitted to the local hospital for tests, within 2 weeks she was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma a rare blood cancer, it is a treatable condition although not curable. Within 2 days of the diagnosis Maureen received a visit from the Clinical Director at the Hospice who assured Maureen that this was a treatable condition with a good prognosis and that they would keep her job open until she was well enough to return,

There followed a lengthy period of treatment including chemotherapy and stem cell replacement. Throughout this period Maureen was kept informed of developments in her workplace via email and occasional informal visits by her line manager. The terms and

conditions of her employment ensured that she was able to be on long-term sick leave, for the first six months on full pay, then a further 6 months on half pay; eventually with the support of her employers she was granted statutory sick pay and successfully applied for disability allowance.

Once her health began to recover she began to get regular updates from work and undertook some work in a voluntary capacity, attending meetings to ensure she was up to date with changes and developments in the workplace. All this was done with the support and encouragement of managers and colleagues. Now that Maureen is in remission a planned return to work is underway, within two weeks she will be back at work in a paid capacity, employed 20 hours per week in her role in Family Support at the Hospice.

Maureen has been able to make a successful return to work as a fully integrated member of the team; alongside this she is able to maintain a low level treatment regime which ensures that her commitment to work and home life is balanced and fulfilling. This has been a protracted period of support, almost 2 years in total, but as Maureen stated, “work have been very brave in offering this support, it’s really given me something to live for.”

## 12. FAMILIES BENEFIT FROM AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE SCHEMES

*Presented by Merseyside Expanding Horizons Ltd, Great Britain*

*Interviewed person – Anne H., female*

*Type of presentation of interview is - By summarising interview by author.*

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- flexible work arrangements
- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
- child care services

For the last 4 years Anne has worked for Mersey Care NHS Trust which provides specialist Mental Health and Learning Disability services to the people of Merseyside. The Trust is part of the wider National Health Service and employees approximately 4,700 people across 34 sites in Liverpool, Knowsley and Sefton. Her husband, Mark, is a Project Manager in a large construction company. They have two children, Jacob who is 5 years old and Maybelle now 2 years of age.

Anne is employed as a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist, based in the Psychology Department, providing a service to people with eating disorders. She works part-time, standard working hours are 9am – 5pm; however Anne has been able to negotiate some flexibility in her hours to accommodate family childcare arrangements. Subsequently she works from 9.30am – 5pm on 2 days of the week, and from 8.30am – 1pm on the other day. Importantly this allows her to drop off both her children in the morning and still find time for herself to swim or exercise before starting work.

Following the birth of her first child Anne made the decision to return to work following Maternity Leave, however at the time she was working as a Local Authority Social Worker. This was a demanding full-time post, with after-hours working, which did not enable the required flexibility for her family needs. After 3 months back at work Anne applied for a temporary [6 month] part-time post with Mersey Care, this was eventually established as a permanent post allowing Anne fixed working hours and a more manageable workload; it also enabled Anne to have a second period of paid Maternity

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Leave when Maybelle was born. Following the birth of both children Mark was able to negotiate with his employers for 10 days Statutory Paternity Leave; this was not a stress free exercise as they requested him to book the prospective dates in advance, difficult to predict given the nature of pregnancy!

As a family they decided to utilise the services of a local childminder to provide childcare for their children. The service was provided by a qualified childminder in her home, the premises was registered and regulated by Ofsted who are responsible for inspecting all care and education services to children and young people in the UK. Placing the children with a registered childminder meant that both Anne and Mark were able to benefit from the Childcare Voucher Scheme provided by both their employers.

The Voucher Scheme is supported by many large and small employers in the UK; it enables each parent to purchase up to £243 of childcare each month for children aged from 1 to 15 years, provided the nursery, playgroup, childminder or nanny is registered with Ofsted. This scheme works in the form of a 'salary sacrifice' whereby employers are able to purchase vouchers to pay for childcare from a working parents pre-tax salary. This can amount to a considerable saving on childcare costs of up to £1000 per year for each parent, as well as having National Insurance savings benefits for employers.

Being able to afford the services of a local childminder has allowed the flexibility to ensure that a satisfactory work-life balance has been achieved for the family during the early years of both children's lives. The children can be dropped off and collected between the hours of 8am – 6pm, allowing both parents to share responsibility for childcare; in addition the childminder has provided a service that links the children to a local playgroup, nursery and school, and extends into the school holidays.

### 13. AT HOME FULL TIME IN TELEWORKING

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**Presented by Team Srl., Italy**

**Interviewed person – Roberta R., female**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- other type (teleworking)
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Roberta R. is married and at the moment has two sons aged of 3 and 5 years old.

She is an employee of the Municipality of Venice and works in the department of international cooperation and European policies.

When her first son was born in 2005, she moved to Vicenza, a city not far from Venice where she used to live before being married and where her husband still works. When her first maternity leave expired, she could not guarantee her presence in the office any longer.

“I loved my job and wanted to go on with it. My manager felt sorry for my possible dismissal. Together we looked for the best solution among a number of options that were included within the work contract of the Municipality. As one of these options was teleworking, we agreed on it. My director was enthusiastic. However, from that point on I

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could not be in charge of my service anymore. According to the current work contract, performing a managerial job is not possible using telework. Consequently I had to accept a wage-cut”.

Roberta’s work contract is for one-year. It has been renewed four times (in the meantime the second son was born). The contract provides for the daily locability of at least two hours daily of teleworking and her physical presence in the work location in Venice for at least a day a week, possibly when management meetings are planned. At the Municipalities own expenses, Roberta has a set of technical tools at home: a pc, a scanner, a dedicated phone line, internet and office server connections.

In spite of her free time, Roberta has fixed some rules: three days a week (the Venice day included) she is uses to work full time up to 7 p.m., two days a week she works until 3.30 p.m. and then she looks after her family. At home she has her own office and when she teleworks a babysitter or her parents look after children.

“I felt that a rigorous organisation of my self was a good thing: on the one hand for not to lose concentration and maximising work time, on the other hand for giving more sureness to children that are aware of the mother’s presence and absence.”

This organisation of work allows Roberta to balance family with work in a more appropriate way.

“I go on in working fulltime, not giving up a full salary and a job that I like. My work at home lets me deal with ordinary as well as unexpected needs/expectations of the children; not losing time in travel to and from work allowing more time to stay with them”.

Of course, the telework has also some drawbacks; primarily the career has been frozen. Staying home Roberta is losing some benefits from her job social life.

“After four years of teleworking, the absence from the Municipality from time to time is starting to be a burden to me. It is possible that I do not catch all the social dynamics as previously. It is difficult to continue to be updated due to the distance from work and I loose daily input from management in the job. It may happen that colleagues ‘forget me’ and do not take part in my work as warmly as expected”.

Though there are drawbacks, Roberta believes that the teleworking is the best solution for balancing work and family and she is very positive with this experience.

“Generally speaking, I would like to take more charge in my job, but just now I prefer to have more time for my children. It is not just a matter of quantity of time spent with them but also of quality. In my opinion, it’s impossible to bring up your own sons and to get on in a career!”

At present, as the children are now older, Roberta is now more flexible in her working hours and plans to go to Venice twice a week with a longer stay there. She is taking part in her job life in a more active way and is re-establishing contacts with colleagues. Briefly, this does not mean that in short term she wants to work full time in the Municipality, but simply that she goes on in balancing working activities – and her will to work – with the family needs.

“For the time being I wish to keep on with teleworking, but when children are grown up, I will surely re-invest in my career!”



## 14. BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING TIME

**Presented by Team Srl., Italy**

**Interviewed person – Daniela S., female**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview.

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- care services for elderly or family members with disabilities
- flexible work arrangements



Daniela S. is 39 years old and since 2004 has been working in one of the supermarkets of Coop Liguria of Genoa. She is married, without children. She looks after her parents that live outside the city: her father is elderly and her mother is seriously ill and needs health care in hospital. To face up to this difficult situation, Daniela benefits from some facilities provided by national law, no. 104/1999 for employees that look after own disabled/diseased relatives.

“Quite often I benefit from leaves permitted in law, no. 104 for supporting my parents and mainly for helping my mother with her medical visits and therapies, but often these hours are insufficient”.

This is one of the reasons why Daniela has accepted in conjunction with her department colleagues to take part in the innovative system of self-management of work time that has been introduced in the company since 2008. The model is based on a job organisation called ‘islands’, which are groups of employees from the same department that manage their own work-time. People express their own time preferences for a period of 2 to 4 weeks. These preferences are matched with the work-loads of the store. Satisfactory agreements between the company and the individuals’ needs are supported by a specific piece of software. Each ‘island’ is coordinated by an ‘animatore’ who is in charge of collecting individuals’ time preferences and matching them with the department, and the company requirements.

«I did not have any problem in participating in this pilot project since its start-up I thought it could greatly improve my own situation as well as others. The job organisation called islands allows us to fit our work time and in the meantime makes us happier. Job becomes lighter and more rewarding for everybody. People do not like to be always compelled to give up their interests or hobbies because of a bad work-time! »

For balancing her own family needs at best, Daniela usually alternates between a week of morning work and a week with afternoon work. Colleagues and the animatore are mostly helpful. «When impossible, I make the best of the circumstances and adjust myself to the situation. As colleagues work hard to make me happy, in turn I have to be aware of meeting their needs when requested ».

Briefly, with the time organisation in islands, Daniela succeeds in managing family commitments and then causes the company the least trouble. «With a rigid timetable fixed

by the boss of the department, I would normally be forced to ask frequent changes of shifts, time off or early finishes. In this way personal needs and wishes are balanced with the store needs ». A further benefit that Daniela easily gains from the 'island' is to have some time for herself: « As I can balance family and work in a better way, I can find some free time for my wellbeing: for example going swimming at the swimming pool, relax and take holidays ». Another benefit Daniela can gain is the possibility of a free Saturday:

«Saturday is a 'difficult' day and the supermarket is really crowded. So, in my store vacation periods usually start from Sunday. With the 'island' system, I plan to be free on Saturday and to stick a holiday week to it. This is a real benefit as all inclusive tours last from one Saturday to the next one ». In short, Daniela is very happy with the 'island' system that makes her life less dominated by her heavy family situation.

## 15. FATHER'S BABY CARE

*Presented by Team Srl., Italy*

*Interviewed person – Giuseppe L., male*

*Type of presentation of interview is* - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- [paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company](#)

Giuseppe L. is 41 years old, married with two children of 5 and 7 years. For 15 years he has been working as a worker member in a no-profit cooperative of Genoa. He is in charge of projects and initiatives for disadvantaged people. His wife works in a non for profit association and has the so-called 'contract of cooperation on project'. She is not an employee. At the end of her maternity protection leave she could not benefit of any other leave for child care.

“Just before our baby's birth (2002), my wife and I gathered evidence on the measures for maternity/paternity support. We discovered an opportunity for taking daily' leave for feeding in lactation period'. As a worker member put on the same footing of an employee, I could claim using this measure”.

In consequence of some recent new provisions in this matter in Italy, this leave is not strictly linked to the proper feeding and has been extended also to fathers as it concerns child care fostering in general. Briefly, this leave consists in 2 hours of rest a day (10 hours a week) up to the first birth year of the baby and it is completely free of charge from the National Institute of Social Security.

Giuseppe claimed this opportunity from the company: “At first there was some astonishment, but afterwards this leave was granted without any problem. With my director's agreement, I planned a time schedule: a reduction from 8 to 6 working hours a day with an early start or early finish.

In this way, Giuseppe had more time to spend with his baby. He benefitted of a sort of 'jolly time' for any expected and unexpected needs of her daughter while supporting his wife in her return to work and in the family care.

The Giuseppe's hours cut had a very soft impact on the company efficiency. He was

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involved in a funded project and was used to working by objectives. “I managed my time in a very flexible way. From time to time, I had to work in my own time”.

When his second daughter was born in 2004, Giuseppe claimed another ‘leave for feeding in lactation period’. In this second case, this leave was absolutely needed as the baby was seriously sick and needed to be hospitalised for a while. Health care of the child called for a more personal involvement of Giuseppe. Drastic work time cut in hours was absolutely necessary for him. Even if other measures for child care with serious and lasting sick problems might have been claimed (for example leaves granted in the Law 104/1992), Giuseppe liked better the previous measure, as “it’s easier to use, without too much bureaucracy”.

Briefly, Giuseppe could look after his own children to be able best tackle a family emergency without being compelled to give up all of his full salary and without any cost for the company. This situation could be easily managed because the company was quite positively oriented: “measures work well only if the employer is quite flexible. Good will from the company and colleagues is a must!”

## 16. A PUBLIC VOUCHER FOR BABY SITTING

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*Presented by Team Srl., Italy*

*Interviewed person – Simone P., male*

*Type of presentation of interview is* - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- child care services
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Simone P. is 23 years old and is a single parent with a child of 3 years old. The child’s mother has not looked after him for a long time. Parents and relatives take care of his son when Simone is on work.

Simone is a social educator in non for profit organisations of Genova. He is recruited with the so-called ‘contract of cooperation’. In 2009, he wanted to acquire a further professional qualification of ‘socio educational animator’ and took part in a training course by the EC, supported by the local authority Provincia di Genova. This course had a traditional training element as well as field training in welfare organism.

For attending the course, Simone benefited of the so-called ‘voucher of familiar assistance’ that the Provincia di Genova within a series of measures (‘system of actions on work/life balance). He benefited of a free baby sitter for some hours a day during a whole month. “In the Provincia announcement of the training course, this opportunity was mentioned and I claimed it”.

The voucher of familiar assistance is a benefit of a public system of actions aimed at facilitating work-life balance for women who are in charge of small children, disabled or elderly people and want to participate in professional re-training and guidance programs or even to start a new job particular to their re-training period. Though conceived for women, the voucher was easily granted to Simone in consideration of the new Italian provisions in favour of fathers.

Simone benefited of the service of baby sitting that is managed by one of the non-profit cooperatives that are sponsored by the Provincia. «Thanks to this benefit, I could release my parents from the ‘burden’ of the child minding for a few hours a day, as the baby sitter looked after him for three hours per afternoon. In that period I did not find any crèche for him and my family had to be committed to child minding all day».

At present Simone’s son attends a nursery school and his father has a part-time contract with another cooperative for socio-pedagogical assistance of disabled children. In this ‘new’ job, Simone did not yet have a planned timetable, and is engaged in substituting other colleagues: he has to be very flexible as he is informed on his substitutions just at the last minute.

Obviously this situation is somewhat hard to manage. However Simone has been expecting that for the next school year, his situation will get better as his managers and colleagues are fully aware of his own situation and his needs.

Shortly, the benefit of the mentioned voucher, even if for the limited time, was a very positive tool for a person like Simone who wanted invest in his professional growth but facing hard balance problems of work/life, he could feel discouraged to look after his professional life.

## 17. CAREER IS NOT A BARRIER FOR HAPPY FAMILY

**Presented by Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, Latvia**

**Interviewed person – Solvita B., female**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by summarising interview by author

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- care for pregnant women
- flexible work arrangements
- training/retraining of employees, who return to labour market after a break due to family reasons
- career break
- other type (collective agreement)



Ms Solvita B. works in JSC “Valmieras stikla Skiedra (VS S) – Valmiera Glass Fibre Company as a planning engineer. She started to work in the company in 2002 as a finance book-keeper, in 2004 she became an economist and since 2005 she has worked as a planning engineer.

It is very important for her to have flexible working time in the company, because she has two sons and a husband in her family and they need her full attention when she is at home. She is now on her child care leave. Up to now it was necessary to plan her day and work time in such a way that she could bring her older son to kindergarten and later on to pick him up, after work hours, she had to manage for instance a visit to a hairdresser, so she could take out her kid from kindergarten until 6 p.m.

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She is very satisfied with job regulations in the company because she works day-shift from 7.40 a.m. to 4.10 p.m. Her work day starts when she and her husband take their son to the kindergarten, then her husband takes her by car to the work place and then he goes to work himself. This is because they have only one car in their family and it is very important to plan their time.

According to Solvita this kind of work time in the company was established before she started to work in the company. Public buses are scheduled according to the company's work time so any employee of the company can go to and from the workplace very easily, as the company is located on the outskirts of Valmiera, the employer of the company agreed with the municipality to such a bus service.

The employer was always encouraging if her child was ill. He found a way for another employee who could replace her at work and carry out her duties. According to the Labour Law of Latvia she or her husband could stay at home with the sick child.

There is unwritten order in the company that a woman who is on her child care leave regularly shows her interest in company's life, e.g. phone calls or visits to colleagues. So it is easier for her to be integrated in the work life after child care leave.

According to the Collective Agreement there is one paid day off on the occasion of an employee's marriage (first time) and one guaranteed unpaid day off on birth of a child. The employer partly covers summer camps for employees' children and also pays a benefit on the occasion of child birth.

Even more support is being provided from the employer side: Christmas party for employees' children, paid allowance for employees' children starting their first school year. To strengthen work collective, the employer finances summer sport games where employees can take part together with their families, the employer organises also a major Christmas party as well if finances allow it.

According to Solvita it is very important that the employer finances mandatory health examinations before an employee starts to work in the company and also they cover yearly health examinations. And even more, the company fully or partly covers health insurance which depends on years of service in the company. Employees are also insured against accidents in the work place.

Solvita thinks that it is important that the company cares for former employees as well so they can buy insurance policies with partly financial support from the company.

Once a year her direct immediate superior organises discussions with every employee separate about working conditions, future plans, improvement of professional skills or suggestions. According to her it is very important that she as an employee has been heard and involved in everyday job activities.

Some more important points that are set down in Collective Agreements regarding work and life balance:

- The employer allocates additional leave 3 days per year for a woman who has 3 or more children at the age up to 16 years or disabled child. (This condition directly refers to Latvia situation as a number of single mothers increases but no official statistical data about that);
- The employer allocates leave for studies and examinations for employees who are successful in their studies in every kind of educational institutions: 1 day per week

during study period for adoption of an educational program; 20 calendar days during period of educational year or public examinations or by agreeing of both parties if studies are offered by initiative of the employer;

- If necessary, the employer provides conditions for organising industrial training with theoretical and practical training within the company and afterwards gives job opportunity according his/her specialty and qualification;
- In case of training for a new occupation/position and/or improvement of professional qualification, the employer maintains employee's average monthly wage for no more than for 3 months;
- The employer allocates allowance amount of 2 minimum wages (LVL 360 or €512) in case of wedding if an employee establishes a family the 1<sup>st</sup> time as well as regarding employee's child's birth.

## 18. FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS – GREAT SOLUTION TO WORK AND LIVE IN BALANCE

**Presented by** *Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, Latvia*

**Interviewed person** – *Sanita L, female*

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by summarising interview by author

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- flexible work arrangements
- training/retraining of employees, who return to labour market after a break due to family reasons
- other type (collective agreement)



Ms Sanita L. works as a manager of public relations (PR) in the biggest NGO in Latvia since 2006. She is divorced and cares alone for her two sons (9 and 15 years old). Work day in her institution starts from 8.30 a.m. and ends 5.15.p.m., but for family reasons she can use work time to visit them at home with employer's permission if one or both of sons are ill or she can go to the boys school during the work time if there is any problem at school. It is important for her that employer allows her to take lunch-break at the same time when her sons have school lunch-break time. As she lives close to the work place she spends her lunch break at home and her sons come home at that time too. She can do some cleaning of the house during that time if necessary as well.

Sanita says that the real situation of her life initially was to look for work and life balance at the work place. Before she started to work in this institution, she lived in a town approx. 100 km far from Riga, so she moved with her sons to Riga. Her kids were younger and got ill quite often so it happened many times that she had to stay at home and had to find a way how she could use timework.

The most important in these cases was the employer who provides her with laptop at home so she as PR manager could always be well informed of what happened in the institution and mass media. She appreciates that the employer lets her one son or both

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stay at the institutions office if necessary and to use computers so they can do their school homework while Sanita is working.

The employer offers the institution's parking place free of charge and the institution's own transport if necessary for personal/family needs. The organisation she works for has a corporate mobile phone network so employees have got mobile phones and free of charge phone calls among each other. It is important that the employer gives one additional mobile phone number of this network for those employees who have children and/or a family member (old mother/father/other relatives or disabled family member) to be in contact with them even when an employee is not at home and those phone calls are free of charge. She stresses that this opportunity always allows her to be in contact with her youngest son and to be aware where is he and what is he doing and do not worry about huge mobile phone bills.

An essential benefit provided is events that have been organised for employees and their family members. Easter, Midsummer event when the institution closes the office and goes outside office premises or Riga city to celebrate the event in traditional style and family members are always welcome to join. Summer sport games are very popular activity in Latvia organised by many companies as well as in the organisation where Sanita works. She always takes her boys with her: even more, they are active sportsmen and take part in all activities within the framework of these sport games.

Every year Sanita and her colleagues in the organisation's office take part in joint work – Great Tidy of Latvia. All inhabitants are invited to take part to tidy their homes, yards and the nature of Latvia, so Sanita with her boys, colleagues and the employer together go to some National park of Latvia or other places to tidy it up as she acknowledges that it is one of her favourite events to be involved with her boys. Colleagues and employer altogether with their family members are doing something really good for their country. Her sons see the result of their work when the environment becomes clean and beautiful so they think before they drop down garbage, she is sure of it.

Since 2008 Sanita entered college to study law. As she says it is not easy to manage all her duties at home and work but the employer helps her by giving paid work days off for her studies when exams are close or she has to prepare some written research work or presentation. Even more, according to the Collective Agreement the employer covers 100 LVL (~145 €) every year for her studies. A year ago she used this money to study in English courses.

Sanita says that the winners are both parties: an employer and an employee. Satisfied employees with no stress about their family matters manage their work and life balance, they desire for vocational training for their professional improvement that helps to achieve the highest results in their work. The employer obtains loyal and understanding employees and the work continues without interruptions, high efficiency of job and minimum expenses.

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## 19. TRADE UNION IS VALUE AS FOR EMPLOYEES AS EMPLOYER

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***Presented by Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, Latvia***

***Interviewed person – Edvins S., male***

***Type of presentation of interview is*** - by summarising interview by author

***Type of services provided by the employers:***

- flexible work arrangements
  - other type (collective agreement)
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Mr. Edvins S. has worked for the last 14 years as a gas filling driver for AGA Ltd. It is a leading industrial and medical gas company established in 1994 in Latvia. He is married and has one child in his family attending the school.

Edvins says that the company helps with work and life balance through the Collective Agreement since 2000. He has used many benefits that the Collective Agreement provides, for example an allowance of 3 days off when he got married, an allowance when his child was born, an allowance for his child when he started to attend school, he also got an allowance from the employer when his mother died as well as he took days off to go with his child on his/her first day back at school after the summer holidays.

As a gas filling driver Edvins works in a shift system – morning and evening shift. The employer is really helpful regarding his child's illness when he has to stay with him at home, so he can change his morning shift to evening if necessary. Employer partly covers employees' health insurance, as well as employees working as gas fillers have been provided with soap-powders and other cleaning aids for always keeping their coveralls always clean without spending their own money.

Edvins stresses that his length of service in the AGA Company shows his attitude to the employer as well as the employer's attitude towards the employee. According to Edvins one of the tools that help to reach good communication with the employer is a Collective Agreement and a trade union organisation in the company that always protects employees and represents them in negotiations with the employer if necessary.

Great respect for employees caused the employer's initiative to help the centre for abused children and Palliative Child Care Service Center where Edvins and other colleagues with their family members made a plan of how to decorate the children's centre during Christmas time and they did it by themselves. He said that he enjoyed doing it more than participating in the employer's organised company's open-air summer sport games or the company's great Christmas Party where family members were invited too. No doubt, he smiled and said that Christmas tree event for employees' children is the best event for his kids because the employer does not spare money to heap presents for them.



## 20. COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT – PLATFORM TO BUILD WORK AND LIFE BALANCE IN INSTITUTION/COMPANY

**Presented by Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia, Latvia**

**Interviewed person – Kaspars R., male**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by summarising interview by author

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
- flexible work arrangements
- additional services provided by company for fathers/mothers who are in paternity/maternity/child care breaks
- other type (collective agreement)



Mr. Kaspars R. is a lawyer in a big nongovernmental organisation in Latvia since 2005. Official working time is 8.30 a.m. till 5.30 p.m. and on Fridays till 3.30 p.m. taking into consideration that he works under enterprise agreement his work time is not strictly defined, most important is to give to the employer fruitful indicators of his work on a regular base. It depends on Kaspars own wish on how he organises his work time, consulting customers and/or preparing claim statements.

He is married; his wife Dina is an unemployed person so she mainly takes care of the house work. She nurses their youngest daughter Estere (1 year and 6 months). Their other daughter is Elizabete (3 years); she attends kindergarten 4 times a week, the youngest – once a week with her sister.

According to Kaspars he started to work in this organisation when he was studying at the university and the employer offered him flexible working time – in the morning he went to the university, after the university he went to the office. He was glad that the university was quite close to his work place so if some or even one lecture was cancelled he could go to work.

Then he got married and according to the Collective Agreement the employer paid him an allowance and gave him additional holidays. An allowance of an additional holiday was given by the employer when both of his daughters were born. Additional days off were allocated when he needed to go to wife's mother's and later on wife's father's funerals. It is provided the possibility for employees with their family members to participate in events or activities organised by his employer: summer sport games, a collective walk to the opera, joint work to put in order some place of Latvia nature, etc.

Taking into account that Kaspars takes his children to the kindergarten on a regular basis, he stresses that it is important for him to organise his work time according to the time of that particular kindergarten. If there wasn't that kind of possibility he would have to pay extra money for the overtime of kindergarten's employee's work. He says that it sometimes happens that he can't go to work or take his children to the kindergarten because of their sickness; in that case he is able to work at home. The employer provided him with a laptop so he can do his work in holidays as well and in any place where the

internet connection is available. This is how he can devote his time to the family as well as to the work.

Kaspars thinks that flexible work time is convenient for both - for the employer as well as for the employee if there is trust between both parties. On the one hand – the work will be done in time when the employer does not control directly, on the other hand – the work at home by employers' mind will not be the norm in intervening in the employee's family life.

In addition Kaspars points out that a great way how to strengthen flexible conditions to balance work and life in the work place is collective agreement.

Some of the most important conditions that are mentioned in organisations' collective agreement regarding work and life balance are:

- Both parties undertake in the collective agreement to provide special conditions for work and family life balance as well as to provide support for young people and for employees in preretirement age;
- To give a chance for organisation's employees' children and young people to work in the organisation during summer period (May to September)
- In special cases: employees' marriage, child birth, death of a family member, employer provides financial allowance;
- By employees' request and consultation with a trade union, the employer offers flexible work time forms to choose work time within framework that is set by the employer e.g. when an employee will start and finish his work day as well as when an employee plans to take lunch break.

He talked about unwritten benefits that are not mentioned in collective agreement: e.g. health insurance, partly financed by the employer when he can insure his wife under corporate health insurance conditions offered to get a good price instead of price she would pay if she would insure herself separately, corporate mobile phone number for his wife that provides their phone calls free of charge so he can always be aware of his family matters even when he is not with it.

## 21. CHILD DAY-CARE CENTRE SERVICES AT WORKPLACE

*Presented by the Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Lithuania*

*Interviewed person - Ramune M., female*

*Type of presentation of interview is – interview summary by the author*

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- child care services,
- flexible work arrangements

Ramune works as an accountant in a shopping centre "RIMI" in Vilnius since 2008. She is 32, a single mother and has a daughter who is nearly 3 years old. Her day-shift is from 8.00 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. The company she works for gave her an amazing opportunity to have her daughter looked after in a child day-care centre for Rimi employees.

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Ramune believed that most of the time parents returning to work become less and less efficient and reliable. They are unable to find adequate childcare, which results in lower productivity at work. Employee job satisfaction is also affected. Furthermore, she notices that parents consistently come to work late and leave early in order to drop-off and pick-up their children at a day-care centre. Rimi has implemented this innovative measure by creating family-friendly environment and at the moment the company is leading in the area of social responsibility in Lithuania.

Even today, when Ramune has the opportunity to meet her daughter a few times a day, to spend time with her daughter during a lunch break, she tells about her challenging experience. "I still remember when I wanted to have a chance to work from home I received a strong message that this time working from home will not be considered necessarily a good thing... And that's got nothing to do with the experience that we had working from home ... it worked really well but ... there's a new person in the role and his view is that 'Oh, it's always better to work in the office'.

Ramune stresses that an employee has a right to request changes to his/ her employment terms and conditions at any time he/she needs and employers have a duty to consider these requests. She says that parents often find that flexible work arrangements enable them to better balance their work and family commitments. So, it is important to provide adequate space and sufficient break times for parents who have returned to work or have their children in a day-care centre at the workplace. On the other hand, it is really challenging to leave a baby whilst working.

Ramune talks about her feelings – "Leaving my daughter with strangers when she's just a baby is not what I really wanted. Even now it's a big stress. If my company hadn't offered day-care, I don't know what I would have done."

Ramune admits that childcare at the workplace is obviously very appealing to the working parents. Firstly, the time travelled between work and the child-care centre is reduced. She just brings her child to work. In this case, she doesn't need to plan her time additionally or to take some extra non-paid hours. This has more than one advantage. It cuts down on potential delays that may occur during travel to the day-care centre. In addition, this decreases daily distractions. Moreover, a huge benefit of a day care centre in a workplace is the parent-child bonding time. Ramune can eat lunch with her daughter and can get involved with the day-care centre's activities and special events. This kind of interaction is very important to the well-being of both – Ramune and her child.

Finally, Ramune thinks that the role of an employer in a reconciliation process is essential. For this reason employers in general should have greater awareness in this field and become more sensitive to family-friendly policies issues. Ramune hopes that if the governments succeeded in shifting the majority of child-care responsibilities to businesses, especially the international ones, that would be the first step of improving life and work balance opportunities at workplaces.

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## 22. YOUNG FATHER'S EXPERIENCE OF PATERNITY LEAVE

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**Presented by Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Lithuania**

**Interviewed person - Vytautas S., male**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - interview summary by the author

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
  - flexible work arrangements
  - additional services provided by company for families/mothers who are on paternity/maternity/child care leaves
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Vytautas is 34 years old senior manager in a private business of office goods and equipment. He has already worked for the company for already seven years and all the time he has been a loyal and one of the most perspective employees.

Vytautas has a rich, but challenging experience in making his choice to take a parental leave with his first child. He knew that it would be difficult to take such a step as he was the first man in a company making such a decision. He spent quite a few months negotiating with his boss, because of the boss' attitude that Vytautas is indispensable and the company couldn't carry on without his presence and will lose the VIP clients who were in a really close contact with Vytautas. Moreover, his colleagues responded very differently to his choice of paternity leave. They were very prejudiced about taking care of the baby by a man.

Vytautas took 3 months of paternity leave, but he wanted more as he was enjoying every day with his baby and a big part of kid's life and they were becoming really close. Fortunately, the boss agreed on a flexible working time, two days a week at the office and three remaining days at home for two more months.

In the laws of the Republic of Lithuania regulating paternity/maternity leave, the term „paternal leave“ does not exist. Instead maternity/paternity benefit and childcare leave are used. The Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania provides for childcare leave which can be used, depending on a family decision, by the mother (or foster mother), the father (or foster father), the grandmother, grandfather or other relatives that take care of the child until he/she reaches the age of three.

The Lithuanian legislation on Sickness and Maternity Social Insurance grants the mother between 126 and 140 calendar days before and after the birth 100 % of the allowance beneficiary's reimbursed remuneration. After this period, any of the abovementioned family members is granted a maternity/paternity benefit until the child reaches one years of age. What is important to mention that in Lithuania the amount of the parental leave allowance from the end of the maternity leave until the child turns 1 year old makes up to 100 %, and until the child turns 2 years old – 85 % of the allowance beneficiary's reimbursed remuneration.

After being on his paternity leave Vytautas feels more involved in family life, more focused and conscious of what is really needed for his family. “You see aspects of your own child development that you would miss if you were only seeing him after five in the evening. It's something you can only understand if you experience it personally” – he says. On the other hand, Vytautas tells that the biggest challenge was missing work. And it's not just

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the work itself. He gives a short explanation “When you work you’re living in a context - in a community so to speak. When you stay at home you’re cut off from that community”.

Moreover, due to the nature of the work, Office system experiences a reasonably high turnover of their staff. After the experience of Vytautas his employer has seen the benefits to the organisation from retaining existing staff and having employees return after the parental leave. Employing new staff means re-training, recruitment costs and a period of downtime while the new employee comes to understand the role, whereas returning staff are trained, know the systems and are able to get straight back to work. In general, providing flexibility for parents helps to retain staff and ensures the benefits for the organisation.

Vytautas says that parental leave should be a positive experience for an employee. Nevertheless, the national representative survey held in Lithuania shows that half of Lithuanian women and men believe that it is not good if the father looks after a new born child for a year or two while the mother is working. Vytautas says this attitude reflects the Soviet time ideology and is strongly stereotypical.

Before taking a decision to take parental leave his advice is to consider some key factors: to take time to fully understand your rights and obligations regarding parental leave i.e. what benefits are available, what notice needs to be given to your employer and how to stay in good communication with your employer during the parental leave.

Vytautas says that it is important to keep in mind that there are clear benefits to business in retaining experienced employees. Therefore, the employer has to support parents not only around the time of childbirth, but to encourage employees to continue staying in the labour market.

At the moment Office system is improving its reconciliation policies and measures by using ‘human resource best practice’ and is trying to be as flexible as possible with the existing business and workload which leads to better understanding the needs of the parents.

## **23. FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS FOR TAKING CARE OF ELDER MOTHER**

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*Presented by Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Lithuania*

*Interviewed person - Armantas J., male*

*Type of presentation of interview is - interview summary by the author*

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- flexible work arrangements
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Armantas is a perspective businessman, commercial director of STREFA Limited Liability Company. At present the company employs 52 people, of which only 17 are women and one woman is Administration Director. The sphere of activity of STREFA covers the supply of hardware and materials to industrial, transport, construction and power-engineering enterprises such as Lithuanian Railway Joint-Stock Company (Lietuvos gelezinkeliai). The main task of the company is the whole sale of permanent-way elements, spare parts for equipment, etc.

Armantas had to move his mother to an assisted living a few years ago because of her

age 87 and her serious mental illness. Later, Armantas and his family moved his mother to their family house. First of all, mother wanted to go back up where she had lived for years. She refused to eat and meeting anyone who used to come to the house. His mother's health was deteriorating so Armantas decided to use the assistance of a social worker provided by government.

The care services for elderly in Lithuania usually are provided by local municipalities and their established Centres of social services where services are financed by the state of Lithuania. One of the services - assistance at home (so called social care) - is provided for no more than 10 hours a week, which is obviously not enough for people with heavy illness. However, most of the time old people in Lithuania are left to their children's care. Armantas says that social services for elderly provided by social workers are so helpful and necessary for such families.

The women from the Center of Social services in Vilnius did a really good job and the mother was fairly good for a while with a worker coming and spending time with her, but soon she started insisting that her son was close and took care of her. Armantas tried to understand her and admits "No one can take care of your loved one the way you do. But I knew that I could not care for my Mum because of my intensive and stressful job. And the thought that noone is taking care of someone you love with respect just gives me the shivers and it makes me feel bad and guilty. After this I took a decision and promised myself to take care of my mother as much as I could".

Armantas knew that his colleagues and especially the director would not understand him and would not be happy about the additional workload if he left. So he had to reconcile his life in a way that would be less harmful for everybody Nevertheless, he was so happy about his employer's positive reaction to his decision. After the negotiation Armantas got the approval from his company to do his e-work according to the agreed terms and conditions with the employer and to work for the settled hours from home utilising information technologies.

Armantas appreciates a lot that the employer allows him to work according to a flexible timetable. In Lithuania flexible working time arrangements are regulated at the national level (Labour Code). As Armantas needs to be with his mother for at least 4 hours a day during his working time, the employer agreed that he can take off 3 days a week to take care of his mother, but during that time he has to stay online with the office. During the time at home he tried to enable his mother to maintain as much independence as possible and to stay as socially and physically active as he can.

"It was such a tough time. I have learned so much during that time and understood how important the support from your team and employer is" – stresses Armantas.

From his experience, Armantas thinks that government has to encourage or even obligate business and employers to act accordingly. For example the general social care code or agreement for employers should set out requirements for effective management, supervision, and provision regarding the support for employees who have a demand for such work arrangements or special services.

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## 24. FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS FOR TAKING CARE OF DISABLED DAUGHTER

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**Presented by** Office of Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, Lithuania

**Interviewed person** – Agne R., female

**Type of presentation of interview is** - interview summary by the author

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- care services for elderly or family members with disabilities
  - flexible work arrangements
  - training/retraining of employees, who return to labour market after a break due to family reasons
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At the moment Agne works in the company “My perfume” as a sales manager in which 29 workers are employed. The Company sells body care and skin products and works to ensure consistent high quality and efficacy of its products which are created from the best of both newly discovered as well as traditional natural ingredients.

Agne is a mother of 3 children and the youngest is 23 and she is a challenge of her life. She is mentally disabled. Agne is a single mother. The husband left her after they got the news about the disability of her girl. Now only the oldest daughter is trying to help her. But she has a family to take care of, too. Agne worked for years in a big shoe selling company as an accountant. Unfortunately, one day her supervisor told her that it was her career or her daughter. Agne did not work from 2004 till 2007 April when she got a job in this company. Agne tells her sad experience: „During this period I've found that no one wants to hire me even for a night position because of my situation. I assume it's also because I've been out of the labour market for a time.”

Agne continues: “When you have a child with a disability, working is much harder from the reliability point of view, but for a company especially working in production environment, is it important to know they can constantly rely on you.”

After she received an offer from “My perfume”, she asked for a minimum level of flexibility (leaving early one day a week, etc.) and gave assurances that she will do her best to make up for the time in other ways. However, her employer was really positively disposed towards her and even suggested more flexibility as well as opportunity to take her daughter with her to the parental room so they could have a closer contact and felt more comfortable. The Parental room was the employer’s innovation.

As Agne faced the impact and the rejection from people regarding the child's disability and suffered with curious looks, comments and attitudes to her face and in front of her daughter in different environments. She was worried that she would encounter the same reaction at this workplace. She says that society does not accept and does not offer space for the different, and she as a mother adopted the same attitudes and the imposed standards as a norm, reinforcing her own feelings of shame of the child's differences and, thus, preferring not to expose the child publicly.

From the day she started her work in a company, the new life begun. She could never imagine having such a sensitive, intelligent and thoughtful employer. The Company decided to help Agne not only by giving her flexibility and additional time at the workplace to spend with her daughter but moreover, they decided to grant “money for care” (cash

payments). This is the most common form of social support in Lithuania as well. In addition, people with limited financial resources may also benefit from social insurance sick leave benefits, as well as the disability and old-age pensions.

Agne says that private companies in Lithuania take just first steps in implementing family-friendly policies. These kind of initiatives aim at raising awareness on social responsibility, they add value to businesses, country and each individual and accelerate enterprises to embed principles of responsible business into their operations.

## 25. FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILY IS AN ADVANTAGE FOR BOTH FAMILY AND EMPLOYER

*Presented by European Partnership, Lithuania*

*Interviewed person – Aldas R., male*

*Type of presentation of interview is - by summarising interview by author*

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- flexible work arrangements
- other type (family allowances by employer)



Aldas R. is working as an analyst of information technology systems in JSC “Omnitel” - one of the largest telecommunication companies in the Baltic region belonging to “TeliaSonera” group. Aldas is glad to share his experience of the company’s family-friendly policies. Moreover, having a chance to take the advantage of this policy has become a usual practice for all the employees having children. Together with his wife Ramune, Aldas is bringing up three children: a nine-year-old son Lukas and two five-year-old twin sisters Rusne and Agne.

Aldas is living in Kaunas, although the main JSC “Omnitel” office for information specialists is located in Vilnius, which is 100 kilometres away from Kaunas. Therefore, Aldas is given an opportunity to work in both Kaunas and Vilnius offices or to work at home. The employer recognised that the main importance in his work is not the workplace itself, but a qualified and on time delivered professional duties. Undoubtedly, Aldas goes to work in Vilnius even several times a week, even more often if it is needed, because he needs periodically to update his duties and have all the tasks set out clearly and properly, as well as solving complicated matters together with his colleagues.

The company enabled Aldas to work remotely and on flexible schedule: using information technologies and computer networks, Aldas is able to connect to Omnitel information system from home or other places with internet connection and easily complete his work. This opportunity gives Aldas a lot of advantages: he is able to reconcile his working hours with his private time more freely. In the morning, Aldas is able to bring his children to kindergarten and to school and pick them up later in the evening. If children get sick, he can take them to the doctors and can make his job assignments later in the evening. Being able to plan his private time on his own, Aldas seeks to use it in the most effective and productive way. Such flexible way of working is indeed useful for the company itself. Even when Aldas was staying in the hospital together with his child, he was keeping in touch with his colleagues in solving the occurring problems – while the little patient was



sleeping, Aldas did not mind connecting to the network and getting the complicated tasks done.

At the time when A. Rutkauskas' children were born, there was no legislation concerning paternity leave in Lithuania. Nevertheless, the company has been always seeking to take into consideration the needs of its employees. In addition to teleworking possibilities, JSC "Omnitel" also paid allowances on its own initiative to its employees who have a newborn child in their families. When the first child was born, Aldas received from JSC Omnitel an allowance of 1500 litas and when the twins were born – 3000 litas. The minimal wage in Lithuania is 800 Litas.

JSC "Omnitel" are always willingly to provide additional incentives for the employees raising children, which now are regulated by 214 article of Lithuanian Labour Code.

The article states that "those employees who are **raising a child with disabilities up to 18 or 2 children under 12** shall be granted an additional day of rest per month (or their weekly working time shall be shortened by 2 hours). The employees who are raising 3 or more children under 12 shall be entitled to 2 additional days of rest per month (or their weekly working time shall be shortened by four hours) and shall be paid the average wage by the employer." Usually the employee agrees about the additional days of rest or shortened working hours with her/his employer in advance.

As Aldas is raising three children, the company provides him with two additional rest days with a pay. His wife Ramune working as an administrator in the company "Jurby" also takes advantage of these additional monthly childcare rest days. Aldas is happy that when it is properly reconciled with other colleagues, these additional days can be chosen in the most favourable time for his family. His family uses these days in different and creative ways. Sometimes the whole family has a four-day weekend spending time together outdoors or by the sea. Sometimes Ramune and Aldas alternate these days, in this way they can spend more time with their children at home – a chance of being at home with one of the parents is a real joy for the kids.

Often, if there is no need, Aldas does not take these rest days, which among employees are called "mother days". Always loyal to his company Aldas says with a smile, that there is no need to misuse these days without a good reason. Moreover, so called "mother days" are used by both, men and women within the company – they are popular and do not cause misunderstandings among other employees. Besides, additional "mother days" do not create bigger workloads or additional responsibilities to Aldas' colleagues as he tries to organise his work in such way that he fulfills all duties in time by himself.

Therefore, in Aldas opinion, the opportunities to reconcile work and family life existing in the company help to bring the family closer together as it makes the communication within the family stronger and increases the understanding between parents and children.

Furthermore, through the support to its employees raising small children and implementation of different effective family-friendly policy measures, JSC "Omnitel" also makes a huge contribution to its marketing strategy. The public image of the company is constantly improving and allows attracting high-qualified employees and keeping them in the company for a long period, which has a mutual benefit.

## 26. FAMILY- FRIENDLY WORKPLACE WITH „MINI KINDERGARTEN“

*Presented by European Partnership, Lithuania*

*Interviewed person – Egle V., female*

*Type of presentation of interview is* - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- child care services
- flexible work arrangements
- other type („Get together“ for celebration, organised by employer)



Egle V. lives in Jurbarkas, a town situated in the south west of Lithuania.

Egle is a happy 34 year old mother of 3 children – 8 years old Paulina, 4 years old Elena and the youngest daughter Agne, who is only 1 year old. Together with her husband Egle tries to find the best solutions in sharing the childcare responsibilities and reconciling them with their work schedule.

Egle is employed as an accountant at the shop which belongs to a private enterprise of Birute Gardauskiene “Pas Agota” in Jurbarkas town. Egle has already worked there for 10 years. In 2001 when the first daughter was born, she took the maternity leave till the child turned 1.5 years old. Then Egle decided to go back to work -“I was missing my work and my colleagues, we are like one big family” she said. However, there she faced a problem – the daughter was often sick and it was not advisable to bring her to the kindergarten. The parents of Egle were working, the mother and father –in-law lived in another town. The best for Egle was to remain with her daughter for a longer period; however her wish to return back to her workplace was too strong. Finally she found a baby-sitter for her daughter who took care of her till the girl became 3 years old and could start to attend the kindergarten. “I felt a big support from the side of the owner of the company. She is a very warm person, always inquiring of me or my colleagues about their families, their children, asking if everything is ok or if we have any problems”.

The kindergarten closes at 17.00, when the work at “Pas Agota” ends at 18.00 on week days and at 14.00 on Saturday. Egle, like other women working at the enterprise, had to go leave work earlier to pick up her child “My husband works as a truck driver, he comes back very late. I am the one who has to share my time between my child and work”. Egle received big support from her employer – she could go out to pick up her child from the kindergarten before it closed. She also could take a free day when the child got sick. Egle also used the additional day of rest per month as foreseen by the Law.

The Law states that those employees who are **raising a child with disabilities up to 18 or 2 children under 12** shall be granted an additional day of rest per month (or their weekly working time shall be shortened by 2 hours). The employees who are raising 3 or more children under 12 shall be entitled to 2 additional days of rest per month (or their weekly working time shall be shortened by four hours) and shall be paid the average wage.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania, article 214 “Additional privileges to the individuals raising children”.

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As the shop opens also on Saturdays, Egle was bringing her child with her to the workplace.

“Our owner gave us a separate room equipped with toys in the loft of the building, where we can leave our children while we work. They play there and we feel better knowing that our children are here and safe”. This children’s room facility had a role of a mini kindergarten established by the employer within the working premises.

The care and safety of children staying in the playing room was ensured by the employees themselves. They looked after their children on a rotation basis. Such family-friendly environment created by the employer encouraged Egle to give birth to 2 more children. “I felt that I can manage both – taking care of the children and doing my work. Our owner gave us that possibility”.

Egle took 1 year of parental leave after the second child was born. After that she had a baby-sitter taking care of the child when she was at work, while the older daughter was attending kindergarten. Besides 2 additional days of rest offered by the Law, she also enjoyed the longer holidays offered by the employer “Our director always told us to spend more time with the children.”

Enterprise “Pas Agota” has an old tradition to organise Christmas celebrations for employees and their families in a hall rented by the employer. All employees and their family members are then engaged in choosing the theme for carnival, creating masks and choosing little presents for each other. Birthdays of everyone working in the enterprise including the owner are being celebrated 2 times per year: one together celebration for those born in the first half of the year, and one for those who were born in the second half of the year. Such decision was taken by employees themselves to avoid too frequent celebrations as the birthdays were occurring every month.

These events are always celebrated at home of the owner with participation of employees with their spouses and children. Besides celebration of birthdays of employees, there are other events organised by the employer to its employees and their family members. “We all have lots of fun together. There is no feeling that someone is the boss, someone is just a worker. We are like one big family sharing its joys and sorrows” says Egle.

At the moment Egle is in parental leave with her third child who is 1 year old. “Even if I am now on leave, I often come to the shop with my children to visit my colleagues and our director. We talk about work, about life while drinking coffee. It is a nice place to come back”.

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## 27. THE ADVANTAGES OF WORK AT HOME FOR PEOPLE WITH COMMITMENTS TO THEIR FAMILIES

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*Presented by European Partnership, Lithuania*

*Interviewed person – Svajunas A., male*

*Type of presentation of interview is* - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
- flexible work arrangements
- other type (“Get together” celebration, organised by employer)

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Thirty seven-year-old Svajunas A. works as a technical consultant in JSC “Festo Lietuva”, which specialises in pneumatic and electrical automation technology. “Festo Lietuva” is a part of a worldwide “Festo” company. Together with his thirty six-year-old wife Elena, Svajunas are raising two girls: seven-year-old Vaiva, one and a half-year-old Simona. He has been working for this company for more than eleven years. In his first years, he was working in Kaunas office and living with his family in Kaunas city. Nevertheless, the company has realised, that it would be more convenient to have a representative for Western Lithuania (Klaipeda region) living in Klaipeda.

The company suggested to Svajunas to become a representative for western Lithuania and to move to live in Klaipeda. After several discussions with his wife, Svajunas agreed to move to Klaipeda with his family as his wife is from the region and they have relatives and friends living there. JSC “Festo Lietuva” took an example of good-practice from international “Festo” offices on establishing small representative offices of the company in employees’ home and suggested Svajunas to establish his work place/office at his home. Svajunas liked this idea, thus the company helped him to buy a flat in Klaipeda and to set an office up in one of the rooms. Furthermore, the company provided him with a mobile phone, personal computer, other office equipment and with a car for work purposes.

Because the work of a technical worker is dynamic and requires personal trips to clients, there was no need for the company to open a separate office. Thus, Svajunas has now been working remotely for ten years already and is happy, that such kind of work helps him to plan his time better and reconcile it with family life more easy. Such working conditions are very useful for him, especially, as his children are still small: if they get ill and he needs to take them to the clinic, he is always able to plan his work in such way, that he can be supportive to the family and to fulfil his duties in time. Moreover, Svajunas jokes: “My colleagues always tease me about the conditions of my work. They say, that I only have to wake up, step in my flip-flops and I am already at work”.

Despite the advantages such work has given to him, Svajunas also mentions the disadvantages. Since his job consists of working with clients, sometimes there is a need to meet them personally, for instance in order to present new “Festo” products or meet particular client’s needs. In such cases, Svajunas has to organise the meetings either at the client’s place, in a café or educational centre, as he cannot invite his clients to his home office, loaded with toys and children voices.

Once a week (on Fridays) Svajunas makes a trip to the main office of JSC “Festo” located in Kaunas, which is in around 200 kilometres distance from Klaipeda. Additional meetings are also organised in Kaunas, when the director, who permanently works in his office in Finland, comes to Festo office in Kaunas. The schedule of these meetings is always planned in advance, so it is not hard for Svajunas to adjust.

Furthermore, Svajunas’ wife is working as an accountant under similar conditions. Her workload is not high and she also works at home. Therefore, their family is special: their little daughters are raised in the care of their mother and father. They agreed not need to take their children to kindergarten or educational facilities or have a baby-sitter.

Svajunas and his wife consider such working conditions as a real gift for their family. Because of the Finnish legislation, by which it is compulsory for the companies having thirty or more employees to have a gender equality plan with work-life policy measures as a part of it, it is fully understandable, that all the innovations concerning work-life balance are tolerated, recognised and even promoted by the director of JSC “Festo Lietuva”, who has been running the company for five years.

In Lithuania, a new law imposing, that all parents, who have a newborn child (until the child is one-month old), are entitled to one-month paternity leave and the paternity allowance of 100 % of reimbursed remuneration for this period, and was enacted. All employees working in the company took this kind of leave. Svajunas took one-month paternity leave when his daughter Simona was born. In his opinion, the first month after the child is born is crucial for the family. During that period both parents develop their first ties with the baby and the mother feels the support from her husband, thus the relationship within the family gets stronger. Moreover, JSC “Festo Lietuva” gives its employees, raising two or more children under the age of 12, an opportunity to use monthly additional rest days in accordance to Lithuanian Labour Code, which are paid by the company. Both men and women in the company can take these additional days.

Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania, article 214 “Additional privileges to the individuals raising children”: employees who are **raising a child with disabilities up to 18 or 2 children under 12** shall be granted an additional day of rest per month (or their weekly working time shall be shortened by 2 hours). The employees who are raising 3 or more children under 12 shall be entitled to 2 additional days of rest per month (or their weekly working time shall be shortened by four hours) and shall be paid the average wage by the employer.

Svajunas said that the company provides annual Christmas holiday parties for the employee’s children, where they can get some Christmas presents. Nevertheless, he remembers, that several years ago the company organised an exclusive event for its employees – together with their family members they could take a flight over Kaunas in an airship, which was brought to Lithuania for several days for advertising purposes. In Svajunas opinion, this was the most memorable and interesting event. Therefore, in order to motivate its employees and keep them loyal, JSC “Festo” seeks to set some traditions for its employees and their families, so they could feel as one big family.

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## 28. FAMILY DECISION – MOTHER AND FATHER TAKES PARENTAL LEAVE ALTERNATELY

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**Presented by European Partnership, Lithuania**

**Interviewed person – Giedrius L., male**

**Type of presentation of interview is - by summarising interview by author**

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
- other type (“Get together” celebration, organised by employer)

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According to the Law on Social Insurance of Sickness and Maternity, maternity social insurance benefits are eligible to one of parents (adoptive parents) or a guardian, who are undertaking the parental leave until the child turns 2 years old.

In Lithuania the amount of the parental leave allowance from the end of the maternity leave until the child turns 1 year old makes up to 100 %, and until the child turns 2 years old – 85 per cent of the allowance beneficiary’s reimbursed remuneration. Starting from 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2010 the amount of the parental leave allowance from the end of the maternity leave until the child turns 1 year old will be 90%, and until the child turns 2 years old – 75% of the allowance beneficiary’s reimbursed remuneration. This Law entitles both men and women to the parental leave.

Traditionally, women are the ones who choose to take parental leave, although there are good practices when men could opt to take this opportunity. Thirty seven-year-old manager of M. Gumbrevicius commercial and service company “Gelsva”, Giedrius Labanauskas, who returned to work after the paternity leave 6 months ago willingly agreed to share his experiences.

Together with his wife Ramune, Giedrius is raising two girls: a nine-year-old Austėja and two and a half-year-old Meida. When their first daughter was born, Giedrius’ wife Ramune took the parental leave. When their second child was born, the new amendments of the Law on Social Insurance of Sickness and Maternity were just adopted.

According to these amendments<sup>8</sup>, Giedrius could take paternity leave and get paternity allowance, paid by the State Social Insurance Fund of the Republic of Lithuania.

In Lithuania the paternity leave is entitled to men only from the day of childbirth until the child is 1 month old. The amount of paternity allowance makes 100 % of the allowance beneficiary’s reimbursed remuneration.

“Paternity leave is essential to the family: during the first month after the baby is born the mother is able to take time to recover, while father can take care of the child and the house. Earlier, before the law concerning paternity leave was adopted, parents and in some cases one of baby’s grandparents (usually grandmother), were taking annual or unpaid leave. Nowadays the support from government is really high.”

Supposedly the paternity leave encouraged Giedrius to replace his wife, who was taking maternity leave the first months, by taking the parental leave himself. When their daughter Meida reached 9 months of age, Ramune initiated to work part-time and Giedrius took the parental leave.

Prior to delivery of the baby, Ramune used to work as a secretary at Birstonas tax inspectorate. However, while she was on maternity leave, the inspectorate had been incorporated into Prienai tax inspectorate and the workplace of Ramune had been closed.

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<sup>8</sup> Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania, article 180 „Childcare holidays until the child reaches the age of 3“

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Even though she was offered another job similar to her previous one, she decided to refuse that offer and choose a more simple but part-time job. In such a way, both parents by rotation could take care of their 2 daughters, thus saving money that they would have spent for the baby-sitter. As Ramune was working only half of a day, Giedrius had enough free time which he used for building and equipping their new family house.

Some of Giedrius' colleagues were sceptical and sneering about his decision to take the parental leave. It was too unusual for them to face the fact when father stays with children, while his wife is working. Nevertheless, there have been colleagues and especially females who approved of such decision taking by Giedrius and showed him high respect.

Nowadays Giedrius is very happy for making the right choice. His family became very close; both parents got used to share responsibilities and duties and as an added-value was the new family house, built by them where they are living now. Giedrius says that parental leave made him more calm, more self confident. "While I was working, I had to "tear" myself between my job, construction of house and the increased family. It gave me a lot of stress, I lost hope to ever finishing the building of our house and felt guilty for not giving enough attention to my daughters and wife. Parental leave gave me opportunity to plan peacefully all the things I had to do and to order them consequently. "

M. Gumbreviciaus commercial and service company "Gelsva" where Giedrius works has departments in whole Lithuania: Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipeda, Siauliai and Panevezys. In total it employs 457 employees. Even in the times of crisis, the management of the enterprise seeks to maintain loyal and motivated staff and tries to create family-friendly workplaces.

Traditionally different events are organised for employees and their families. In summer time, all employees are invited to stay 1-2 days by the seaside or some farmstead in different Lithuanian towns and have an active rest, participating in different sporting competitions. New Year celebrations is usually organised in a restaurant and employees are invited with their spouses. Children of employees enjoy the Christmas performance annually organised in one of Kaunas theatres with participation of the Santa Claus and presents.

Giedrius says that such family-friendly attitude from the side of the employer is beneficial to the company: "one can feel the harmony in the relations between the employees, their willingness to assist each other and interest in effective development of the business of the company. Every employee will perform hundred times more than required by the employer if he or she will feel that the company is interested not only for the work result achieved by the employee, but also cares for her/his private life".

## 29. FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE AT PUBLIC INSTITUTION

**Presented by Social Innovation Fund, Lithuania**

**Interviewed person – Ruta D., female**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by the person, who made the interview and summarised the ideas of interview

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- paternity/maternity/child care support leaves by company
- flexible work arrangements



Ruta D. is a 29 years old single mother of a boy Algirdas who is 3.5 years old. Ruta is a senior specialist in social issues and declaration at Sanciū District of Kaunas Municipality, where she has been employed since 2003. Ruta is a very active young woman, interested in deepening her professional knowledge and raising her qualifications. At the same time she cares a lot for her son and tries to give him as much attention as possible.

Working in a public institution, as Ruta says, is a big plus as the employer has to follow all legislation, adopted in Lithuania. Being a single mother is not easy, especially if you work 8 hours per day and have to take care of your child at the same time. Ruta tries to keep herself informed about all the updates in national laws related with the maternity and childcare issues and tries to get the maximum benefit out of it at work and in daily life.

After the birth of her son, Ruta took the maternity leave and remained with her son till he turned 1 year old. As her son was often sick, Ruta decided to extend her maternity leave time till her son becomes 2.5 years old. She returned back to her workplace which was retained by her employer as foreseen by the Labour Code<sup>9</sup>.

“All people in our department are very friendly and supportive, especially the Head of the District, I was happy to return back and start my work again” said Ruta and added that a nice surprise for her was the decision by her employer to give her additional responsibilities - consulting people on the issues related with declaration and to organise training at her workplace. She was informed about the new duties before returning to her workplace. The responsible person and co-workers provided her with all legal information she might need when starting the new functions. “It felt like coming back home where everyone is waiting for you and ready to help” – Ruta always felt close to what was happening at her workplace while she was staying at home with her child as she was receiving constant calls from the Head of the District and her colleagues, who were inquiring about her life and telling her the latest news. “Our workplace has a very friendly environment, everyone is encouraged by our chief to communicate and help each other”.

When Ruta started back to work, she had no option but to bring her child to the kindergarten. “I was looking for a kindergarten closer to my workplace. As I live in the suburb of Kaunas it was much easier for me to bring child somewhere closer to my work, so that I don’t need to waste time on driving, especially when there are big traffic jams in the morning and in the evening when the kindergarten is closing”. There is a lack of

<sup>9</sup> Labour Code of the Republic of Lithuania, article 180 „Childcare holidays until the child reaches the age of 3“



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places at early childhood training institutions in Lithuania; therefore, Ruta was lucky to find one in walking distance from her workplace. However, Ruta faced problems with time arrangements. Ruta's work day starts at 08.00 in the morning and at the same time the kindergarten opens.

As her son is very sensitive, initially he was often getting sick and sometimes Ruta had to go to kindergarten even during the day to take her son and go directly to the doctor. She asked the authorities in written form to allow her to start her working day later. At the same time she agreed with the Head of the District to allow her to take off some hours or a day in case of unexpected situation with her child. Her needs were met with understanding "All our staff including the Head of the District have very positive attitude towards the employees having children" said Ruta and added that sometimes she had to take her child with her to the workplace when she had nowhere to leave him. She was allowed to keep her son in her office, where he could draw and play in the "children corner" made especially for him.

Ruta says that thanks to her family-friendly organisation, she has no problems regarding reconciliation of her work and care for her son. She can always take some free hours and days if she needs due to any problems related with her child. All employees at Sanciū District are allowed to make holiday arrangements, however it is important that at least one specialist in the field will be always present.

Ruta says that at her workplace both men and women are willing to take maternity/paternity or parental leave and are always welcome: "It is a really family friendly workplace! We feel safe here knowing that we can use all benefits guaranteed by Lithuanian laws, our Municipality organises annually Christmas celebrations for children of all employees working in all Districts of Kaunas Municipality, and in summer time we have the possibility to rest at the farmstead together with our family members".

"I feel happy working at my present workplace and knowing that my employer understands the needs that parents usually face when she/he has a child to care for".

### **30. CAREER BREAK - A WAY TO RECONCILE WORK AND COMMITMENT TO MOTHER**

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*Presented by Social Innovation Fund, Lithuania*

*Interviewed person – Giedra-Marija L., female*

*Type of presentation of interview is* - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- career break
- 

Giedra-Marija L. is an associate professor at Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University, Department of Educology, where she has a permanent position as lecturer for the students. At the same time she has a position as a Chair of the Centre for Educational Studies. Her work as a lecturer is organised under a strict schedule, while she is flexible in planning her work time at her second workplace.

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Giedra is a 68 years old widow. She has 2 grown-up children and already enjoys her grandchildren. Nevertheless, in autumn of 2009 one incident in her family gave a new turn in her ordinary life.

Giedra's mother, who is 93, unexpectedly experienced a very complicated heart disease resulting in insertion of heart pacemaker. At that time her mother was living in Vilnius together with Giedra's sister. However, upon return from the hospital her mother needed a lot of care, someone had to be with her 24 hours per day. It was too hard for Giedra's sister to look after the mother, thus Giedra decided to take her mother to her home in Kaunas.

"It was a non-standard situation – I had to find out how to reconcile my duty to my mother and the duties I had to my students at university, where the lectures are held according to a strict schedule stated in advance". Finally, Giedra took decision to take 4 months of unpaid holidays and to dedicate herself completely to her mother and take good care of her.

A collective agreement of Vytautas Magnus University states that employees performing creative work (engaged in writing a book, articles, constantly participating in courses to raise qualification, etc.) are eligible to be absent at work for a certain and clearly defined period of time without being paid. Unofficially Giedra calls that period as unpaid holidays.

There was no objection from the side of University authorities towards Giedra's request to be given 4 months break from her work with students. "Maybe one of the reasons that my request for holidays was agreed immediately was my long record of service at this university. I have worked here since its establishment" said Giedra and immediately added that no obstacles are made to any of the university workers, when they have a need to take a break from work due to their personal problems which are very important to them.

Having solved the main problem related with her main duties at university, Giedra could look after her mother at home and at the same time she continued to work at the Centre for Educational Studies where the time schedule was rather flexible and she could work at home as well. Living together improved significantly the daughter/mother contact which was lost partly while the mother was living in another town with Giedra's sister. Staying with mother helped Giedra to reveal her feelings hidden deeply inside.

"All my life while raising children and working I mostly concentrated on my family and my job. Being with my mother I rediscovered my relationship with her, the joy of having talks together, telling about the events happening in the town, retelling the concert or movie we had seen. We often consider our work as the most important thing in our life. We gain money, which later we spend on other people, which we hire to look after our older parents, instead of finding time to look after them ourselves. One day we will become old as well and our wish will be that our children take care of us. As a result of kindred relationships people become more human, get rid of the so-called "social scales", and lower their ego. They simply become warmer and more open to the environment that surrounds them."

As an expert in lifelong learning, Giedra emphasises the need to teach people to make a proper evaluation of their duties be it for their work or family. "One has to make a choice what he or she wants to learn in this life. Only then life gives you a bonus".

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Giedra's choice was to learn how to make the life of her mother more interesting. Giedra discovered the "miracle" of reading books out loud. She started to read books for her mother, who couldn't do it herself. Giedra enjoyed the search for the literature that her mother would love to listen to.

Time spent with her mother gave an opportunity to Giedra to develop her social skills and to broaden her way of thinking. "Being with mother I learned how to be more creative, every day whenever noticing that my mother needed something or she felt not well I tried to think of doing something that would make her feel better. In this way I was feeling much better myself. Here appears an added-value – feeling good not only for what you have done but also being happy for making another person feel good."

Giedra's mother's health improved during those 4 months and that the daughter and mother spent time together. She could return back to Vilnius where she lived with her second daughter, and Giedra was able to return back to her work.

At university she noticed that the behaviour of her colleagues in respect of her had changed – the mutual communication became more friendly and warmer. "For them I used to be just a director, a supervisor and now they discovered that I also had problems at home, I am just like any other human. They knew I have an old mother, but the break I took at work in order to dedicate myself to my family strengthened our relationship".

According to Giedra, employers in Lithuania should create a more flexible work arrangement scheme, allowing different forms of work – work at home, part-time work, etc. "No one director is against this, but as a manager he or she comes across different problems related with their employees. There should be a substitution system created allowing fast substitution of an employee who unexpectedly has to remain at home due to family issues. It is like in an emergency case when you have to fight a fire – it happens unexpectedly and if the employer doesn't have any prevention system for such cases, he or she doesn't know what to do. It is not an easy task, however good managers succeed to solve it."

## 31. FLEXIBILITY IS VERY IMPORTANT FOR SHIFT WORK

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*Presented by Social Innovation Fund, Lithuania*

*Interviewed person – Gerute K., female*

*Type of presentation of interview is* - by using the quotations of interviewed persons in quotation-marks and combine with the text which is written by person, who made interview and summarised the ideas of interview

*Type of services provided by the employers:*

- flexible work arrangements
  - other type ("Get together" celebration, organised by employer)
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Gerute K. lives in Panevezys and works in the security company JSC "Jaros sauga" as a security guard for 10 years. Unusual in Lithuania to see a woman dressed in special uniform in the supermarkets or specialised shops, however Gerute said she really enjoys her job and would never change it.

Gerute is 48 years old, divorced. She has raised 4 children – the oldest son who is 25 years old, and 3 daughters at 23, 22 and 17 years of age. The youngest daughter still lives with her mother. Though the children are already grown up, Gerute remembers

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those times when her children were young, her husband was mostly away for work and she had to work and care for her children at the same time.

Gerute is a very active woman, which always tries to learn something new, to have a lot of work to do: “I don’t believe when people say that there is no job for them, it is not true! There is only laziness of people and lack of will to work” said Gerute. She has been working in the kindergarten as a cook and sometimes as a nanny when her first child arrived. Even though her director of the kindergarten told her to stay longer with her child and enjoy the maternity leave, Gerute returned back to work when her child was 8 months of age. Her parents died very early and she couldn’t expect much help in childcare from outside. Due to the specifics of the workplace and the good will of her director and other staff members, Gerute was able to take her child with her to the same kindergarten where she used to work, thus she had a chance to combine the childcare with her functions at work. Such favourable situations at work encouraged her to return early to work also after birth of her other 3 children. She used to bring them with her to work, thus she could take care of them while working. During the times when some of the children were sick, she could take a day off paid or a sick-leave for a longer period without a risk that she might lose her job.

“I was maybe lucky that in my life I met so many good people and all my employers were very understanding and supportive” said Gerute. Her new job as a security guard was a big challenge for her – even if the work was organised on a shift basis, she had to be absent at home for 24 hours and leave her children alone. As her children were already older than 12, she was not eligible to the additional days of rest or any other allowances that are guaranteed by Lithuanian legislation to parents having children under 12 years old of age.

“Women form the majority of security guards in this company and almost all of us have children of different age. We are very lucky that we have such an understanding director who is always open to our problems and needs. He is more a friend than just our boss”. One of the family-friendly measures that were applied at the organisation was the flexible working time organised on a shift basis. Women were allowed to shift their working day with the colleague if they need to have an additional free day. Those employees who have small children are encouraged to use the possibility to take an additional rest day.

While working in JSC “Jaros sauga” Gerute got a second job in another organisation, named JSC “Biciulis” where she also works as a security guard in one of the biggest shopping centres in Panevezys. She managed to combine two jobs due to the possibility to work on shift basis. Directors of both organisations are very understandable and sensitive to family issues of their employees, always communicating with all of them and responding to their needs. Gerute, same as other women working in security, could always ask for shorter working hours or free day in case of an urgent need to stay with her children, she could use longer lunch breaks so that she can have lunch at home with her family. Holidays are planned in accordance with the family situation of the employees. Gerute is planning to go to London in August and she already knows that she can plan ahead as it is better for her to get approval from the director.

“Our director is really supportive. Women who work here, they know that they can always count on him in any situation. Enough to give a call at any time and you know that you will get help”.

“We use to organise a get-together with other employees and their families. However, as JSC “Jaros sauga” is protecting assets in different cities of Lithuania, usually we meet only in the town where we work.” Few years ago “Jaros sauga” used to organise New Year celebration for its employees and Christmas theatre performances for their children in Anyksciai, where the central office of the enterprise is established. As employees have been working in different towns within 60 km radius from Anyksciai, the company’s bus collected them and brought them to the place where the employer was organising an event.

“It does not matter how many children you have, if you have a chance to meet employers with such family-friendly attitudes like I have met during my life – everything is possible. You can have both – work and family and enjoy your life”.

## 32. FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS PROVIDE POSSIBILITY TO RECONCILE WORK AND CARE FOR ELDER MOTHER AND MOTHER-IN-LAW

**Presented by Social Innovation Fund, Lithuania**  
**Interviewed person – Liudmila P., female**

**Type of presentation of interview is** - by summarizing interview by author

**Type of services provided by the employers:**

- Flexible work arrangements
- Teleworking



Liudmila P. is 60 years old lady from Kaunas, Lithuania. At the moment she is the one, who is taking care of her 81 years old mother who suffers from different age-related diseases, and her mother-in-law – a 88 years old lady who has a diabetes.

Liudmila’s nationality is Russian, she arrived to Lithuania in 1975 from Kaliningrad, where she worked at secondary school as the teacher of mathematics. At that time her brother was already studying in Lithuania. Liudmila liked Lithuania a lot, started to learn Lithuanian language and completed the course of computer programming at Vilnius University. Later Liudmila was employed at the Institute for Development and Research in Kaunas as a responsible for information technologies and data proceeding. Soon she got married and the first child was born. The philosophy of Liudmila is that the family is more important than work so she took a decision to stay 1 year at home with her child and afterwards she returned back to her workplace. Same decision was taken after the birth of the second child. Due to the specifics of her work, Liudmila had a possibility to work at home so when the children were sick she could stay at home with her children at the same time performing the tasks appointed to her by the employer. Since 2006 Liudmila works as an accountant at JSC “European Partnership”. This is the time when her mother

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and her mother in law started to get health problems due to their age. Liudmila's mother got a blood disease, the final statement of the diagnosis took a long period of time, Liudmila had to spend lot of time taking her mother to different doctors, waiting for her while she was passing different tests, analysis and procedures. Moreover, just when the disease has been finally diagnosed and the treatment plan fixed, Liudmila's mother broke her leg, could not move freely and Liudmila had to live with her mother for a certain period. In same year, Liudmila's mother-in-law has been diagnosed with diabetis and she needed Liudmila's help with insulin injections as being at that age she was forgetting to make them sometimes. Liudmila has a big stress as now she had to take care of 2 elder ladies both of them living separately in their own apartments, and to fulfil her duties at her workplace. Fortunately, the director of JSC "European Partnership" was very sensitive and understanding the situation. Liudmila has been offered the flexible working time – she has to be in the office 10 days per month chosen according to her availability to do the tasks that require presence in the office, while other work can be done at home. Such suggestion from the employer was very helpful for Liudmila – she could arrange her work load in accordance with her responsibility to take care of her mother and mother-in-law, especially in cases when any of the ladies has to go to hospital or to pass several treatments in the same day that sometimes takes almost half of the day.

Liudmila personally felt responsible for the wellbeing of her mother and mother-in-law and did everything what she felt right to be done to make everyone in her family happy.



## **FACILITATING FAMILY LEARNING ON WORK & LIFE BALANCE**

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