Men in care
WORKPLACE SUPPORT FOR CARING MASCULINITIES

Transnational Analysis of Studies in Organizations

ABOUT MiC PROJECT

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

TERMS OF USE

AUTORSHIP

This report has been written by Marc Gärtner (Institut für Männer- und Geschlechterforschung, VMG, AT), Elli Scambor (Institut für Männer- und Geschlechterforschung, VMG, AT) and Marta Warat (Institute of Sociology, Jagiellonian University (JU, PL), based on the information contained in MiC national reports (chapter 2) by Marc Gärtner (AT, DE), Elli Scambor & Oliver Posch (AT), Paco Abril Morales, Cristina Castellanos-Serrano, Teresa Jurado-Guerrero, Alicia Martínez and Jesús Cruces (ES), Ásdís A. Arnalds, Kolbeinn Stefánsson, Guðný Björk Eydal and Ingólfur V. Gíslason (IS), Reaktor-Resarch in Action (MK), Ole Nordfjell and Danel Hammer (NO), Marta Warat, Ewelina Ciaputa and Ewa Krzaklewska (PL) and Živa Humer, Majda Hrženjak and Mojca Frelih (SI).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1   Introduction

The EU project MiC investigates how company conditions can be changed in such a way that men can be better involved in care tasks in the family. MiC is based on long-term changes that are closely related to gender equality and ideally have a positive influence on it.

On the one hand, work itself is changing: the proportion of women in the labour force, in particular in qualified work is growing; in the area of leadership and management, glass ceilings and a monoculture have been criticised for some time; flexibility is increasing in the knowledge and service society; hierarchies are being replaced by more cooperative forms of work (England, 2010; Sullivan, Gershuny, & Robinson, 2018).

On the other hand, attitudinal and practical patterns among men are also changing, often following changes among women: instead of a patriarchal gender hierarchy, more egalitarian models are now preferred, and care work - whether paid or unpaid - is now also coming into the focus of men; the change in fatherhood is questioning the tradition of the breadwinner, and paternal leave is increasingly becoming an option for fathers (see Fthenakis & Minsel, 2002; Holter, 2003; Puchert, Gärtner & Höyng, 2005).

Yet, all over Europe men encounter barriers to become involved in caring, which need to be reduced. It seems to be important to change the perspective from 'Do men want to care?' to 'Do organisations want them to care?' In many cases the answer is: Most organisations are built on and reproduce traditional gender roles: main issues are lacking opportunities for work-family balance as well as barriers in occupational career for men who care (Fernández-Lozano et al., 2020, Gärtner, 2012; Holter, Riesenfeld & Scambor, 2005; Langvasbråten & Teigen, 2006) Since most carers are women, there is a strong connection between the issues of care and gender (in-)equality in organisations (see Stone, 2007). Therefore, men and care would be a core element of better work and career conditions for women.

In the early 2000s, the EU-supported six countries study Work Changes Gender (Puchert, Gärtner & Höyng, 2005) asked about the involvement of men in gender equality processes and the awareness of the situation of part time working men. The usual reaction in organisations was "We don't have anything like that here!" (Holter, Riesenfeld & Scambor, 2005). As the authors summarised, "Gender has become allowed as an organisational issue, but only as far as women are concerned" (ibid.: 84). Scambor et al. (2013: 72) later summarized this study: "Traditional provider roles of men have not been questioned on organisational level which results in persistent traditional work distribution models between men and women. Moreover, men in care-giving roles in particular are sanctioned, sometimes directly devaluated for not meeting organisational expectations of men as expandable performers (see Gärtner, Gieseke & Beier, 2006; Holter, 2003; Holter, Riesenfeld & Scambor, 2005). This contributes to a cultural system that confirms gender-traditional identities (breadwinner role) and couple arrangements (see Holter, 2003), while inequality at the workplace is constantly reproduced."

According to the MiC project framework concept for analysis[1], MiC studies work-life measures and organizational cultures "that allow caring masculinities to develop", especially looking for best practices. All project partners include a study on "three to five best practice companies and/or public administrations" in their countries, focusing on "reconciliation measures, such as longer leaves of absence, tight working times, flextime, and spatial flexibility", but also on more general organizational cultures. This report summarized and re-asserts the MiC National Reports, focusing on organizational barriers against (ch. 5) and supportive factors for men's care (ch. 6), a model of change (ch. 7), developments triggered by the Covid 19 pandemic (ch. 8), recommendations and good practice examples (ch. 9)[2].

2 Methodology

1. Target and qualitative approach

The initial and overall objective of the organizational analysis was to "identify and comparatively analyse best practice models for achieving a high level of work and life balance to enable both men and women to have time and flexibility to care for their family members – specifically aging family members, children, themselves, friends and colleagues – and reduce the gender bias of family support measures in the public and private sectors" (MiC application, Annex 1). The narrow target of finding good practices at the workplace was modified throughout the process: The structure of the reports also included barriers and supportive factors, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and to reconsider a more general, theoretical model of organizational change towards gender equality with respect to caring masculinities.

A qualitative approach using case studies is a largely applied and effective way in practice-oriented research (Yin, 2014; George & Bennett, 2005). For MiC this has, in fact, a double effect: Organizations support the data collection and thus the analysis; subsequently they are involved in advisory processes in which MiC practice methods and tools are tested.

Triangulation is supported by not only using one kind of source in each organization, but a variety. In the case of MiC, the instruments applied were:

> a company questionnaire covering structural data and measures, such as HR, gender equality and work-life policies,

> interviews with representatives of HR/leadership/gender equality officers,

> carers and, in some cases, also their partners.

This helped to get a multi-layered and differentiated picture of the work-life situation in each organization studied. The research was conducted by semi-structured individual

---

1 See "MiC Organizational Analysis: Proposal for important dimensions & theoretical inputs", by Elli Scambor & Marc Gärtner, Sept. 2019.

2 For more national details see country reports on: https://www.men-in-care.eu/results .

interviews (with guidelines coordinated in the international consortium). This (main) methodological strategy was considered appropriate because we were looking to gain insight in the thoughts and experiences of the male employees themselves, about the WLB situation at their workplace.

2. Selection of companies and study conduct

The main criteria for the selection of organizations were twofold: At least some good practices in terms of men, care and work-life balance had to be visible in the respective organization, and a certain sectoral spread as well as a public/private mix were pursued.

Other criteria were considered important, too: As the Spanish (and, similarly, the Norwegian) team put it, organizations were interesting where, *"male employees took advantage of WLB measures, so companies with a generally high proportion of men on their staff were included. This also allowed for the analysis of gender dynamics and masculinity in companies."* Also, a diverse company size was considered desirable. While the Slovenian team managed to recruit smaller and medium sized organizations, the other teams found this challenging and found bigger organizations with more diverse areas that actively promoted WLB policies.

The recruitment process was conducted through the partners' networks and suitable contact persons (rather than through an open sampling and recruitment), since this was considered an efficient way to get a trustful access to organizations. The networks usually consist of social partners, diversity and gender equality institutions or HR networks. MiC teams organized national multiplier events with co-applicants and affiliated partners to identify organizations that would match the criteria and probably be interested. In Slovenia two stakeholder interviews were conducted which also helped to identify good practice models in companies. Also, the Spanish team stated: *"Six stakeholders were interviewed prior to the companies being selected. The aim was threefold: to publicise the ongoing research, to test the topics we wanted to address and to obtain contacts to access companies meeting the previous criteria. Among these stakeholders were two trade union leaders, the head of social security and equality within an employers' association, the head of the human resources forum of a regional employers' organisation and two experts on gender and time use policies in companies."*

The interview processes ranged from later 2019 to February 2021. Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic framed the study process differently in the participating countries. Under lockdown conditions, face-to-face interviews conduct were replaced by video or telephone calls. However, it can be stated in the sense of the Austrian report that *"this proved to be unproblematic after the period of habituation."*

The interviews were recorded when possible, and the analytical work was conducted with transcripts, grids or excerpts. The anonymization of respondents was obligatory, while anonymizing the organizations was assigned to the individual country specific approaches. Thus, while most partners anonymized the organizations as well, the Slovenian team did not as their selected organizations *"present examples of good practices in WLB".*

Altogether 172 interviews in 21 organizations have been conducted (see Table 1).

Usually, the initial interviews within each organization were conducted with HR or similar departments in order to get basic information on care, gender and work-life on the organization level, as well as access to men carers as potential interview partners.

As the Polish report points out, *"we were interested in the recognition of various aspects of care: in addition to childcare, taking over unpaid public tasks, self-care, care for partners/relatives, and other forms of care (MiC Application, Annex 1)."* It must be noted that, beginning with this broader notion of care, most teams could identify many cases of care around fatherhood, while other aspects of care proved more difficult to find. As the Austrian team put it, *"Male employees who provide care work in their family and living environment were considered as suitable interviewees. This was thought of in a broader sense (e.g. as care for needy relatives), but in practice it was restricted primarily to fathers who, because of their paternity, took temporary leave or reduced working hours for longer periods. This narrowing alone is an interesting interim result, as it indicates that caring masculinities are strongly associated with involved fatherhood and that other care aspects seem to have a much weaker profile."*

Table 1. Interviews in companies

COUNTRY	ORGANIZATION/COMPANY	EXPERTS	MALE CARERS	PARTNERS
Austria	WorkNet	2	3	0
	ResearchSchool	1	7	0
	AutoCom	1	3	1
Spain	Co1	5	1	0
	Co2	2	5	0
	Co3	3	3	2
	Co4	2	3	0
	Co5	2	2	2
Norway	LifestyleCo	2	5	1
	FinanceCo	2	7	3
	EnergyCo	1	9	4
Poland	Company 1	5	9	3
	Company 2	3	4	1
	Company 3	3	4	3
Slovenia	Police	6	6	3
	Saubermacher-Komunala Murska Sobota d.o.o.	2	3	3
	Mikro+Polo d.o.o.	2	3	2
	Donar d.o.o.	2	2	0
Iceland	Bank	1	3	
	Power and utility co.	1	4	
	Preschool	1	3	

3   Company summaries

The project applies a model of three phases of development towards gender equality[3] to better understand how the companies can support men's care work (see chapter 7).

To reflect on the development of the companies in relation to caring masculinities, the study includes diverse companies, operating as public, private, or non-profit entities in various sectors: higher education and research, administration, insurance, finance, banking, transportation, energy, chemical, furniture manufacturing, waste collection and public service. They also range from small size, family-run companies or middle-sized companies to branches of international companies. What the companies have in common is their interest in developing measures aimed at reconciliation of professional work and care.

1. Gender equality

In most companies, gender equality has been a part of the company policies. Only few studied companies (e.g. AutoCom, AT; EnergyCo, NO) can be described as lacking in gender equality or reflecting a "*macho culture*". In others, gender equality is strongly linked with the position of women in the labour market and prevailing gender stereotypes affecting women's careers. This approach is reflected in the overall equality/diversity policies and particular measures implemented in the companies. These measures focus on ensuring equal opportunities for women and therefore address issues such as gender pay gap or underrepresentation of women in managerial position (WorkNet, AT; EnergyCo, NO; LifestyleCo, NO; Company 2, PL) or uneven share of women among employees (EnergyCo, NO; LifestyleCO, NO; Company 3, ES; Police, Sl). More advance situation is in companies in Iceland which are obliged to meet the legal requirement of implementing gender equality plan. While it aims at increasing diversity, balancing the gender composition of employees within fields and departments, ensuring work-life reconciliation and increasing awareness of issues concerning equality (Bank, IS; Power and Utility, IS), but also emphasises gender mainstreaming (Preschool, IS). Little attention has been so far given to the concept of caring masculinities which is seen as an "emerging" issue. While in some companies (WorkNet, AT) it is addressed through the feminist equality discourse and becomes a part of gender mainstreaming strategy, in others – it is based on company values and culture: equality (AutoCom, AT; EnergyCo, NO; Company 3, PL; Company 2, PL; Bank IS), diversity (EnergyCo, NO; Company 1, PL; Company 3, PL; Mikro+Polo, Sl), sustainability (LifestyleCo, NO; Saubermacher - Komunala Murska Sobota d.o.o.) or family-friendliness (AutoCom, AT; Donar d.o.o., Sl; Bank, IS) to name a few.

---

[3] Holter Ø. G., Riesenfeld V. & Scambor E. (2005). ‚We don't have anything like that here!' – Organisations, Men and Gender Equality [So etwas haben wir nicht! - Organisationen, Männer und Gleichstellung]. In R. Puchert, M. Gärtner & S. Höyng (eds.), *Work Changes Gender. Men and Equality in the Transition of Labour Forms* (pp. 73 - 104). Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

2. WLB Measures

In all companies work-life balance is used as a framework to talk about men's engagement in care. Almost all companies, with few exceptions (such as LifestyleCo, NO) where flexible working arrangements were in principle limited and possible only in a special occasion, have implemented a wide spectrum of measures. They range from statutory policies (such maternity, paternity, parental leave; paid days when the child is born; paid days for a care of a sick child/family member) to tailored-made solutions offered by particular companies (additional paternity/maternity leave, flextime, tight time schedule, the possibility of accumulating working hours and transferring them to free time later, leave of absence for different personal/family reasons, unlimited paid leave, a flexible number of work hours during the child's first year, teleworking, formal and informal shift changes, a sabbatical year, child time bonus; measure for health protection or health promotion at the workplace, free breakfast for employees, financial support for children, educational courses including personal coaching and courses on personal development, employees' networks) and more innovative solutions such as shorter working day without reducing the salaries (Donar d.o.o., SL; Power and utility, IS; Preschool, IS) or blurring the sharp division between private life and work by bringing family issues (caring responsibilities, working schedules of partners, family members), and personal interests (hobbies, skills, projects) in the company (Mikro+Polo d.o.o., SI).

Most of the WLB measures have been already officially implemented as a part of company policies, but in some companies, there are no mechanisms which would encourage to take them up except for informal supervisors' encouragement and their good will (Power and utility, IS). These companies (ReseachSchool, AT; AutoCom, AT) offer individual and informal options to reconcile work and care. On the one hand, such care-sensitive environment can be seen as advantage, but it makes taking a measure dependant on the approach of the supervisors and raises a question on sustainability of such solutions. The WLB measures are seen – as in case of Police, Sl - as "'win-win' situation for employee and for employer". Emphasis is on personal well-being, on understanding that one is not only a worker, and if s_he is able to care of him_ herself and the family, s_he will perform better at work.

The implementation of WLB measure could indicate that in this area, the companies fit rather into advance stage of our model. Yet, from the perspective of developing caring masculinities, it should be noted that most of the measures are gender-neutral and are addressed to all employees, regardless of their gender, age, position. As the expert in one of the Polish companies admits: "*Sharing care responsibilities is an employee right, the leave is your right, you have a right to parental or paternity leave*" (Expert, Company 3, PL). Thus, masculinity and men are not specifically addressed in welfare and WLB policies, except for measure directed to fathers such as paternity leave and a few days of paid leave, when the child is born. Such approach can result in low take-up of these measures by male employees (Company 1, PL) or their invisibility for male carers (WorkNet, AT). The lower usage of WLB measures by men is also linked to slow change in social expectations – especially in rural areas – that they will be taken by women.

3. Care

The companies across all countries declare that the support for male employees undertaking various care roles and care is an important value in their organizational culture. It is confirmed in the experts and carers' opinions who – as one of the employees from LifestyleCo (NO) - admit that "*to talk about leave with the leader and such, and to get it through, and to be able to talk about it openly to colleagues, as well as to come back again (from leave) in such a good way, it was done in an incredibly good way*". Despite the good condition for caring masculinity, the measures and initiatives focus mostly on a narrow understanding of care strongly linked to parenthood, with few exceptions where the care of a member of family (partner or parent) and self-care are present. The former is mostly supported through paternity and parental leave while the latter - through providing benefits to employees, including sport activities, wellbeing sessions. The men involved in other aspects of care (such as caring for important others, environment, local community) are less represented in the companies. Thus, there is a need not only to develop measures addressing other aspects of care, comprehensive and clear communication about the measures available to male employees but also to increase men's awareness and involvement in care.

4   Barriers

1. Working structures

Flexible work arrangements

In all countries the working structures follow the main trends in the labour market and the companies make the WLB measures such as remote work / telework / flexible work schedule available to the employees. Yet, their availability and scope depend on regulations and company culture, affecting the actual use of WLB measures. In Austria, the lack of spatial flexibility is reported in WorkNet company, and it is connected to the company culture of not taking work home. The practice of working only in the office is clearly communicated to the employees who claim that "*If you cannot do this, you are finished after one year*" (AT: 55). Flexibility is also significantly modified by type of work and position. As the Spanish (ES: 55), Icelandic (IS: 10) and Polish (PL: 47) reports show, even if WLB measures intend to be offered to all employees, in practice they are provided only to certain groups of employees (usually white-collar employees), limiting their usage for blue-collar workers as well as employees in operational work based on rotating shifts (e.g. at factories, transportation) or front-desk work. The company commitment to WLB measures can also decrease due to the patriarchal culture and a traditional vision of gender as well as the attitude of management and the mindset of the employees. The male employees in Iceland also point to a negative impact of a lack of regulations at the company level on the utilisation of remote work and the awareness of its availability. Such insufficient policy framework deters work-care reconciliation, making the remote work dependant on a supervisor's decisions due to a lack of official written regulations how flexibility should be understood. Finally, as it is argued in case of Austrian and Spanish study - the measures directed towards caring masculinities can be delayed when there is a low proportion of

women, especially on managerial/leadership position (AT: 56, ES: 55). The report from Iceland proves this point as well but it also shows that having a hierarchical, complicated and multilevel company structure may hinder the impact of progressive and gender equality-oriented female leaders: "*She has her passion and vision, but then you have middle managers, and this is a large bank, so her vision doesn't necessarily always come across*" (IS: 19).

MiC study provides evidence that flexible work arrangements not necessarily enhance better work-non work balance. Quite opposite, they can increase the work-family conflict. The recurrent theme which emerged from the discussions with carers on remote work and flexible work schedule in all countries is a blurred boundary between work and private life. On the one hand, it is related to the expansion of work: its intensification and prioritization, multitasking or work overload, which occur in companies with demanding work environment and pressure for career advancement. On the other hand, the flexible work modes have increased the overlap of these two spheres and have led to working longer hours due to lack of the physical barriers between work and non-work. As a result, the WLB measures are considered to be important, but they also lead to a rearrangement of working time and working overtime, usually to catch up on work after usual working hours (weekdays evenings and night or weekends) and outside office space. This trade-off between flexibility and fulfilling responsibilities at work is perceived as demanding and tasks-oriented, with little attention paid to the hours needed to accomplish them. The example of companies in Iceland also reveals that "*the out-of-office hours had the tendency to stretch into overtime that was not paid for as such*" (IS: 17) while in Norway "*some workers felt that it was hard to catch up on evening meetings if they missed them, making it difficult to decline participation even when they had the option*" (NO: 49). Other negative consequences of flexible work arrangements mentioned by the respondents refer to health problems and problems in/with the personal relationship as well as psychological, physical or occupational burnout (NO: 49). Anxiety attacks, sleeping problems, being irritable, unpleasant are just to name few of these consequences mentioned by the male carers. Another problem mentioned by the interviewees concerns the invisibility of remote work for the employer / manager. Not being in the same office space and loosening direct and regular contact may result in lack of protection of the employees from being overloaded with tasks by their managers (PL: 46). The negative consequences of WLB measures lead in the Austrian report to a conclusion that in ResearchSchool "*people are working 'at the limit'*" (AT: 55) and their work time often exceeds the official working hours: "*300 overtime hours is almost the bottom end (…) It is rather rare that I go home under 50 hours [weekly]*". (AT: 56). The working culture embedded in such model is called "*a 'flexible unlimitation structure'*" (AT: 56) or "*a precarious culture of compatibility (cf. Gärtner 2012): functional (but demanding) as long as nothing serious happens*" (AT: 57). A similar case is discussed in Norway in relation to the company FinanceCo, when overworking ("*almost worked himself to death*") is related to the in-house coach's use of the term "*the limitless work market*" (NO: 49). Besides these dangers of remote work and time flexibility, if carefully used, they can ease WLB as presented in the following chapter on supportive factors.

Working time and care leaves

In many companies one of the biggest obstacles is the fixed hours of meetings – both the internal one as well as with external partners. Their tight schedule – either early in the morning or late in the afternoon prevents men from becoming involved in care. This work organization affects especially fathers who are not able to take children to nurseries, kindergartens or schools. However, as discussed in the Islandic report, the respondents are aware that meeting their needs and the delaying of work meeting "*would make the work more difficult, as early-morning meetings were thought to be essential for planning the workday ahead and to >>see everyone and meet everyone<<*" (IS: 17).

Other WLB measures such as reducing work and taking sick leave are not found relevant in terms of involving men into care. While the former was mentioned by the respondents in Poland who questioned its effectiveness as a means of reconciling work and family obligations as this solution is found to be financially unprofitable (as it is based on 80% of a monthly salary), the latter was criticized in the Norwegian report which clearly points out that the reduction of working hours and salary did not implicate the reduction of workload. This problem is also discussed in the Islandic report in relation to combing parental leave and part-time employment. The male carers admit that not using the full parental leave did not lead to a decrease of work-demands and in fact prevent them from using the leave they are entitled to:

> "This was of course complete rubbish, to use a percentage. When a person says he is working 20%, the work is never 20%. This is such a valuable time to be with the children, and help out, especially after the woman has given birth and already has three children. But, as I said, I worked much more than 20%. And that was my own fault" (IS: 19).

Moreover, in case of longer leaves (such as paternity/parental leave) in Polish, Norwegian (NO: 49) and Austrian context as well as in case of short leave of absence (few days off) as in case of the Slovenian police (Sl: 69), the reports highlight a problem of a lack of a substitute or successor as a reason for male employees not to use these measures. From the perspective of employees, their absence results in increasing the workload for their colleagues. Thus, due to the feeling of solidarity, a sense of obligation or even a feeling of guilt employees feel reluctant to use the measure to engage in care.

Work responsibilities

The Austrian, Polish and Norwegian reports show that the ability to perform caring duties and self-care is also hindered by extensive obligations arising from contract of employment, especially at the managerial positions. The male carers talked about their work as demanding and intensive, putting constant pressure for career advancement and promotion and embedded in culture of high-level productivity focused on completing tasks and meeting deadlines. This is illustrated by the opinion of a male carer:

> "The crucial point where I said, now it's over, was that I should please fly to India for a 5-hour meeting. That also explains a bit strikingly why it can't work with a family. In the end, I said I was no longer prepared to pay this price. (…) So I said, you have to choose what you want to leave behind, and marriage and my children are not it. I also have friends and acquaintances in the vicinity who have stayed on the career track, where marriages are now also falling apart. (…) It's not worth the money (…) and certainly not worth the health." (AT: 56).

This opinion clearly shows a conflict between work and family life as well as their incapability and the assumed expectation of prioritizing the professional work over other areas of employees' lives. The experiences of "*high pressure, travels, a lack of flexibility and a lack of self-determination*" limit a carer role and possibility to self-care. Leaning towards work than self-care or family life is not necessarily a company requirement but is caused by the culture of individualism which permeates to all spheres of life. In Iceland, the male employees often discussed their work-oriented approach as a sign of their ambition, a strategy to increase their chances for promotion and their own choice, even if difficult one and leading to a conflict between work and family:

> "You know, basically the bank emphasizes the balance between private life and work. I think that it is up to yourself as a person. How you situate yourself, where your enthusiasm lies. So, I think it's a bit individualistic. Me, I myself am extremely work-orientated" (IS: 17).

2. Company cultures

Insecurity and carer's penalty

Male employees admit that a fear of being penalised or replaced hinders them from using WLB measures. They are afraid that due to their potential absence during care leave their position will be taken by their substitute. This is reflected in the opinion of carer from EnergyCo in Norway:

> "[…] sharing knowledge can be difficult, because you feel like you lose some of your uniqueness and indispensability. So, it can be difficult to facilitate for others to take over your job when you're not here, because you feel like you can be replaced before you have to. It's probably unfounded, but there is a problem of insecurity there." (NO: 50-51).

The phenomenon of knowledge hiding is more likely in high-competitive work environment where employees feel external pressure to advance their career, meet the expectation of presenteeism and avail and get positive performance appraisal. In this context, a career is seen as a long-term commitment with increasing number of tasks and scope of responsibilities: "I find it [work] has become pretty burdensome, I'm not able to finish, there is not even a theoretical chance that I can get through with it all [number of tasks]" (IS: 18). In such working environment, the male employees are reluctant to undertake care responsibilities and they are more prone to accept after-hour meetings and

e-mails because this is what "ambitious people" would do to prove their commitment to the company, even if the companies do not oblige them to follow such practices. This ambiguity of workplace boundaries clearly shows insufficient support for employee's self-care and their care work, leading to a situation of transferring the responsibilities for setting the limits on the employee:

> I manage in a way to discipline myself, because it is absolutely toxic, that you can read an irritating e-mail when you are at home and supposed to be taking care of the children. It can disconcert you, especially in the evenings (IS: 18).

Unavailability of speak up culture

The Polish and Norwegian cases point to a lack of speak up culture as one of the barrier men need to deal with. While it is accepted that women will share and publicly talk about their private problems and wellbeing, male employees lack this opportunity. They complain about the lack of space where they could express their issues related to care, self-care and health/wellbeing, which affects especially those who suffer from stressful work. For example, in Norwegian company such situation is explained through applying "'good girl syndrome' that is often talked about in press about women trying to be perfect in all areas of life, and he felt that it was taboo for men to express the same thing" (NO: 51). This quotation reflects also gender expectations of behaviour: men should not complain about their care needs, well-being, health, while the same is acceptable for women. Admitting openly to personal problems and to the inability to deal with stress is perceived as men's weakness. The external pressure to act in accordance with gender expectation is thus another barrier to the usage of WLB measures.

Lack of awareness of measures

It is clear from the analysis in most of the reports that the male employees are not aware about their rights as carers, and they demonstrate lack of knowledge about the measures they are entitled to. This is evident in the following opinion of a male carer:

> There was no reflection what it [parental leave sharing] means to me as an employee, to my career, but also to me on the psychological level, to my personal development. I know this is an individual decision, a family decision. (…) But there should be reflection on it and awareness of it. I talked to my colleagues, and they were surprised that it is possible to share parental leave or to take it together. I would want this consciousness to grow among the staff and the employers (PL: 45).

Similar opinion was expressed by a respondent working at the Icelandic Bank:

> He, changed departments recently, or actually had a new boss, and he wasn't sure if he was allowed to work from home […], you know, he had a bit of a back pain the other day and I said "why don't you just work from home, you have the screen and the key board and…" and he was like "ah I don't know how it is tolerated in the new department" (IS: 11).

In this context the reports pinpoint that caring masculinities are constrained by lack of clear and effective communication which could facilitate the usage of WLB solutions. Only in some cases the HR departments or the managers have undertaken initiatives to inform the employees about their rights through guides for employees, newsletters or workshops. The lack of such approach and resources may indicate the absence of male carers on the companies' agendas: men are not targeted as the recipients of the measures due to assumed gender beliefs embedded in traditional, patriarchal gender roles. From the perspective of men, it can be argued that their lack of knowledge about their rights may indicate their lack of interest in these solutions either because they do not need them or they do not find them relevant in terms of reconciliation of professional work and care. As a result, the inclusion of caring masculinities may pass undiscussed or emphasised only to a limited extent.

Gender culture/ gender substructure

It is argued in all countries that the companies developed gender policies in response to gender inequalities experienced by women in the labour market (e.g. lower participation in the labour market, gender pay gap, glass ceiling) and therefore the measures which are offered aim at increasing the possibilities for women. The inclusion of men in the gender policies has been only a recent development and it is not widely observed among the studied companies. In this context, all reports point to the hegemonic culture as a barrier in developing caring masculinities. The expectation that a woman should sacrifice her professional career to perform care responsibilities while men's care responsibilities revolve around taking children to school, to extracurricular activities in the evenings or taking care of their leisure activities hinder the progress towards recognising men as carers and more equal distribution of care and work among partners. Gender division of care, gender stereotypes and the society expectations are reflected in the company culture. While in some countries this barrier occurs mostly among male employees (e.g. in Austria, Poland) who are not interested in reducing working time even if the measures are implemented and promoted by the managers, in others (e.g. Norway) it is more important among management and leaders. As it is written in Polish report: "*Internalized stereotypes are seen as an important obstacle to choose WLB solutions, even if they are accessible – the 'barriers in the heads of men' have been emphasized in all the companies, underlying the importance of the cultural context*". It seems that the workplace is still perceived as a masculinity contest where men need to prove to be "a real man". Such pressure on enacting hegemonic masculinity forces men mostly to securing economic resources, revealing how gender is constituted through the practices and organizational culture. As a result, the work comes first, and thus the conditions are less supportive for gender equality as care and/or WLB measures are not connected to gender equality (AT: 58, ES: 56).

3. Human factors

Leadership and management

All reports highlight the technocratic, inflexible and restrictive type of management as a barrier for man to use WLB measure. Such attitude was especially visible in case of 'older

generation' of superiors/managers (AT, PL, ES), those expressing hegemonic mentality (ES) and oriented on productivity and effectiveness (NO, PL). In general, the WLB solutions are perceived by managers as negatively affecting career progression. In some cases, as in the WorkNet, the managers are not even aware of men's rights: "*The first conversation was, I come into the office and say that I would like to take parental leave. 'Is that legally your right?' was the first sentence. Then the conversation developed a bit better, but I was truly angry.*" (AT: 58). Moreover, the Spanish report (ES: 57-58) shows that the managers entangle the caring roles, especially fatherhood, with the division on male and female roles, meaning that they perceive caring for children as a "fashion" for men and accuse men undertaking caring roles of being unmale. Thus, the lack of dialog, support and understanding from managers and their lack of sensitivity to men's caring roles pose a challenge to men's responsibilities and questions the need to implement policies and measures directed towards caring masculinities.

While the example from Spanish company refers to microlevel, the Polish report (PL: 46) indicates how the barriers at the microlevel, reflected in the attitude of managers, are under influence of macro-factors. Due to lack of clear policies regulating the usage of WLB measures, the managers apply informal criteria, revealing the impact of personal attitudes and relations between a manager and an employee. As a result, WLB measures can be used only to employees on certain position, with longer tenure or closer connections to the manager. A similar hindering factor occurs in Iceland where the WLB company policies are not necessarily reflected in the managing practices: whether and how the WLB policy is put into practice depend on the individual characteristics of each manager (IS: 19). The employees emphasise that the practices vary among departments: from supportive to neutral (when the utilisation of measures is not encouraged even if the managers are aware of them).

The report from Norway pays also attention to the connection between WLB measures aimed at developing caring masculinities and the diversity policies. The managers who want to hold onto the value of social justice while managing their teams, face a dilemma how to address the diverse needs of team members. The lack of inclusive and supportive approach of the managers may result in discriminatory practices and reinforcing the assumption that men are reluctant to access WLB measures.

Other relevant players and networks

While presenting role models is generally seen as a good practice encouraging men to use WLB measures, the Norwegian (NO: 52) and Slovenian (Sl: 60) reports reveal the danger of promoting an image of career-oriented employee who can sacrifice everything, including family responsibilities and own health and wellbeing, for the career. It has negative impact on the choices of employees who – even if the measures are available – do not use them as they do not want to be seen as not committed to their work.

4. Legislations

In principle, the companies in all five countries have transferred the national regulations into the company policies. Thus, the basic workers' rights in relation to WLB are guaranteed – at least on the paper. However, in some cases more specific regulations or lack of them are indicated as being a barrier to developing care-sensitive measures. For example, the bonus system (up to 50% of a total income) which operates in FinanceCO in Norway (NO: 52) is based on individual results, result of the department or subdepartment and is granted only if the employee works the entire year. In such case, taking a longer leave means a financial loss and makes the involvement in care less attractive for male employees. The Polish case (PL: 47) points to the lack of regulations to implement task-based work as the main barrier preventing the recognition of such logic of work in official work regulations even though such measures have been already used and are considered more effective and beneficial. The respondents in Poland ad Iceland (IS: 20) also point to a lack of financial incentive and the drop in salaries while on parental leave. As the regulations related to parental leave does not offer 100% of compensation, taking a leave means a loss in family budget and the to date lifestyle. The Spanish case (ES: 56) also shows the importance of WLB measures being included in collective agreements as men generally tend not to use the measures which are not recognized and regulated in the collective agreements.

5   Supportive factors

1. Macro conditions and cultural environments

Where an organization is located, matters a lot for a successful process towards gender equality and caring masculinities. Politics and legislation are an obvious precondition for gender cultures. The design of statutory leaves is important for their use: obligatory weeks, well-paid wage replacement with high topping and non-transferability are crucial elements to promote male uptake of parental leaves (cf. MiC Contextual TNR[4]). An increased eligibility for men to take parental and other care-related leaves have been a game changer in many countries, as the Slovenian example shows:

> Changes of the organizational culture and in the society towards active fatherhood is well commented by one of the interviewed men, who 14 years ago used parental leave and received responses from his colleagues: "Are you crazy? Why are you doing that? She should take parental leave". Nowadays that kind of responses are rare (SI: 69).

Non-restrictive work models (like a free 'moving day' in Norway) help to balance work and life. The Slovenian public sector offers two additional days of annual leave for children until 15 years of age; the Polish one does the same by the child's age of 14. And Slovenian Saubermacher – Komunala Murska Sobota d.o.o. offers not only an additional paid day to accompany children on the first day of kindergarten or school (which is provided by

---

[4] https://www.men-in-care.eu/results

national regulations), but also to accompany kids to national competitions (which is additional in this company).

The Spanish report points to external factors, "such as the size of the town, the support – or lack of it – from family members and the work flexibility and care commitments of men´s partners. Sometimes, the lack of other alternatives to taking care responsibility encourages men to use the available WLB measures and to develop their caring roles, integrating the positive aspects of caring roles in doing so." (ES: 60) Environmental cultures matter: in urban contexts (more likely among academically trained employees) often better conditions prevail, providing more openness, or alternatives to conservative family and gender models. The reports on Austria and Poland in particular show that gender roles are strongly influenced by region and milieu. A Polish example shows the opposition between a rural, gender-conservative background culture vs. an internationally/multi-culturally oriented company, that supports more modern gender relations such as active fatherhood:

> "I am from [a big city], and unlike in the rural areas, there is no mother-in-law, where just women take care of children. This is a large city, you can take parental leave and women pass it on to fathers. Men take more care of their homes: they cook, spend time with their kids. Cooking has even become trendy among men living in cities." (PL: 48)

The national, regional or company wage levels influences men's likelihood of part-time work for care reasons (ES: 56). As the Spanish analysis shows, Administrative and white-collar jobs are, as pointed out in chapter 5., usually, by the structure of activities, less time restricted and thus better for flexibility and, at least to some extent, for care. Production and blue-collar jobs are in many cases highly formalized, which tends to be structurally and, if masculinized, also culturally adverse for carers. However, exceptions are discussed in this report.

Sector and business line are often determinants of collective agreements. And as, particularly, the Spanish organizational analysis points out, "collective agreement applied in each organisation has a strong impact, as workers usually consider their labour rights as something they can take for granted, at least when they are permanent workers and job stability is not in doubt. Formal WLB measures recognized in collective agreements, for example flexible entry and exit time, morning or tight time schedule and paid leave for different WLB reasons, seems to be the most important framework for supporting men in taking up unpaid care tasks" (ES: 55). The Spanish colleagues rightfully argue that "In order to use the WLB measures recognised in the collective agreements and actively play a caring role, normally male workers must feel secure in their employment and be confident that there will be no penalty incurred in using them" (ES: 56).

2. Working structures

The formal status and structure of an organization is generally significant for the framework conditions for caring masculinities, self-care and work-family balance. Size and region, hierarchies, staff structure and working structure (not at least in terms of time and space) build the work environment of the organizational culture and the work conduct.

Staff composition - number, generation/age and gender composition

As the Polish report points out, a higher number of employees is usually a prerequisite of support and replacements in case of care leaves or working time reduction. HR and work organization are particularly important here. The staff composition is crucial, for instance the gender and age composition, since these can positively affect the perception of carers' needs, or to develop a critical mass, networks, and measures (PL: 46). Some reports argue that the gender composition is critical as well:

> "... there are more barriers to WLB in those companies having less diversity, i.e. male-dominated companies, both in terms of staff and management. (...) the impact of more women on the staff, especially in management positions, has been noticed as one factor relevant for easing the implementation, access and use of WLB measures in general" (ES: 55).

Other reports tell similar stories, which will be highlighted below at 6.3 (human factors).

Working time and space

All reports emphasize the importance of flexible time and space structures. These provide for different ways of reconciling care and work. Three main kinds of flexible models became visible as (relatively) widespread in organizations researched: flexitime/flexible work schedules, part-time/working time reduction, and home-office/mobile work.

Flexitime models are widespread in every country studied. The Spanish report points to a concentration in white-collar-jobs: "In all the companies analysed, in the areas of administration, marketing, finance and human resources, flexible time has been incorporated as good practice." (ES: 62). In Austria, ResearchSchool serves as an example of a widespread informal flexible working schedule[5], which "enables many interviewees to work flexibly, which also serves the purpose of work-life compatibility" (AT: 51). Many researchers and other staff can usually determine (at least part of) their work schedule to what fits best for them, e.g. to pick up children from the kindergarten early enough. It is regarded as "an 'informal strategy' in terms of ResearchSchool's work-life management, even when academic work structures can lead to blurred boundaries between work and private life.

---

[5] It must be remarked that in research, jobs are usually more flexible than in many other occupations and business lines.

"However ambivalent, flexibility of time (and sometimes space) is the supportive condition mentioned most by the carers interviewed, depending on the individual work mode/job description, on the department culture and, most of all, on the superior (often contrasting with more restrictive, presence-oriented managers)." (ibid.)

The opposite strategy is discussed in the Icelandic report (IS: 10-11) which shows that flexible work arrangements are formally a part of the Bank's work culture and are positively evaluated as helpful in sharing the responsibility in childcare, engaging in childcare (e.g. participation in children's "Christmas handicrafts at school", "taking the day off when it's teachers day" and picking the children up from preschool or school) and providing "less stress".

Part-time work or reduction of hours is possible in many companies in all countries. This usually corresponds to general statutory regulations on part-time work or reduction of working hours in the respective countries (with different remuneration and pension regulations in each case). Moreover, in Slovenia, Donar d.o.o. reduced the daily working time schedule to six net hours (plus one additional hour for breaks) at the same salary. It was not primarily introduced because of work-care balance, but with an increase of efficiency in mind: "Having observed the work processes in the company for a while, we realized people worked efficiently for six hours at the most. The goal was to improve productivity, not with more hours but with better-quality work" (Director Donar d.o.o., SI: 63). This proved, however, to be a win-win arrangement, because it unburdened carers: "Shorter working day represents the most important supportive factor enabling men (and women) in analysed companies more time, which can be dedicated to care needs for family members as well as for self-care and other free time activities." (SI: 69) The shortening of the work week to 36 hours a week without reducing salary was also implemented in the companies in Iceland. While for some companies -including the power and utility company – it was a result of a collective wage agreements made in 2019 to 2021, the preschool could be considered as a pioneer as they introduced 35 hours working weeklong before the measure was officially introduced through these collective agreements. It was argued that shortening of the work week would satisfy the needs of children, both the children attending the preschool and the children of the employees and increase job satisfaction. Both the male employees and their spouses referred to this measure as a "major change" in terms of engaging men in care: *This [shortening of the week] makes it possible for me to take the kids to preschool and I can pick them up from preschool [...]. This has had enormously positive effects on my caretaking of the children (IS: 10).*

In most countries, home-office or mobile work from other places than a fixed office is possible (or even a standard), at least in some jobs. Beyond saving time used for commuting (which can make a significant burden not at least for carers), at Austrian ResearchSchool, working from home helped carers to stay close to the ones they care for while still being available for work. In Norway, home-office or telework is used in all organizations, from engineers to managers and directors. And an expert in Company 1 in Poland says:

In fact, spatial and also temporal flexibility can in some areas be used better in higher positions: The higher the position, the easier it is for the staff - both women and men, because... well, the job related to managing people, it requires a little less participation in the process of doing what is done there on a daily basis and managers have much simpler and real opportunities to take advantage of the benefits that the company offers. (PL: 46)

Apart from the models mentioned, working time accounts (WTAs) or sabbaticals/career break periods can serve as an option for downtime: In general, the aim of a WTA is to control working hours over the longer term and to be able to use accumulations for longer periods of time-off, like sabbaticals or additional care-periods (cf.: Hübler/Bellmann 2015). In some countries like Germany[6] or Austria, civil servants and some employees in other sectors have the option of taking a period off under certain circumstances. Usually, a period is agreed, during which employees receive 80 percent of the usual monthly salary with 100% working time. After 4/5 of this period, they take 1/5 off. Shorter framework periods and free periods may also be agreed.

3. Organization cultures

According to Acker (1991, 1992, 2006) and Schein (1988), "the culture of a company or organization can be defined as collective practices based on (mostly implicit) assumptions that also impact power relations and everyday interactions. Clearly, gender relations and the question 'Who does the care work?' are power-related, based on collective, mostly implicit assumptions and traditions, which impact work relations, conduct, and careers" (AT: 52).

Cultural impact of work structures

Two main models can be distinguished that seem helpful for carers' WLB:

(1) "Cultures of security": As mentioned above under 6.1., collective agreements have an impact on the organization culture, and thus on employees' leeway for (or against) caring decisions. The Spanish report points out:

"Interviewees highlighted that in the social environment of a public organisation where job security is assumed, there is an assumption that using labour rights is the normal thing to do in sectors where collective agreements include relevant WLB measures and collective bargaining is highly relevant for working conditions." (ES: 57)

In many companies, the public sector provides both higher standards of job security as well as easier access – on average – to flexible or care-friendly work models (e.g.

---

[6] https://bund-laender-nrw.verdi.de/service/thema-sabbaticals, https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/lexicon/S/Seite.990097.html.

working time reduction).[7] As Austrian WorkNet and other examples show, being able to go part-time as a matter of course (and without career or other penalties) is also an important factor that defines a "culture of security". It seems important to acknowledge that "(...) *even in sectors where the hegemonic mindset is dominant and not especially aware of gender issues, feeling 'secure' in the labour market, whether in the public or private sector, helps to develop a culture of accepting men´s caring roles.*" (ES: 57)

Another relevant element that can enhance care security is structural predictability: One of the measures at Saubermacher – Komunala Murska Sobota d.o.o. is also that all the meetings are organized between 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. in order to enable employees to fetch their children from kindergartens and schools on time.

Job security is one particularly important element in stabilizing mind-sets of men in non-traditional, non-hegemonic position. A Polish carer exemplifies how different factors contribute to a work and care balance:

> "Without the sympathy, without my wife and my own conviction, without such feedback from my superiors that it [equal division of parental leave] is welcome, that it is not seen as a whim, as strange behaviour, and without assurances that everything is ok here, that you can take the leave and that upon your return nothing will change in the way you are treated, (...) we would certainly not have made the decision [to share the leave]. Even if (...) the state gave the opportunity to do so, I think that without such a positive approach of the managers in the company, we would not have made use of these measures." (PL: 47)

(2) "Cultures of diversity and inclusion": In some companies, mostly global ones, a major supportive factor was that the management had to include staff from a broad range of backgrounds and lifestyles. As in Austrian private company AutoCom, due to its staff of globally rare and highly skilled professionals, "*it is important to offer an* environment *where they feel comfortable in, that they can live out their knowledge and creativity, their expertise in the best possible way*" (AT: 48). In order to prevail in this 'battle for talent', the HR management's goal is a flexibility and an open, creative work environment. Even though a cultural change is needed, as the HR expert points out, according to the interviewees the culture of the company appears already open-minded, flexible and family-friendly. Stereotypes that could be expected in a male-dominated, technical company seem less visible. Besides measures on self-care and (mental) health, in-house childcare, flexible time, and space options as well as generous leave and compensation measures. (AT: 48). A similar example was visible in Poland: A global company develops deep interest in diversity, inclusion, and gender equality. This shapes the company's values in the

---

[7] Mobile work might be a different story, since many jobs in the public sector seem to require a high rate of in-house presence.

direction of a culture supporting care roles (including self-care). And the Spanish report summarizes:

> "Innovation, positive ideas about non-monetary compensation such as encouraging the use of WLB measures to retain talent and workers, and support for cultural change in organisations are factors found in those organisations with a particular commitment to gender equality and WLB measures." (ES: 57)

Although "security" is found more in the public, while "diversity" is found more often in the private sector, both models introduced here are, of course, not necessarily opposed, or exclusive.

Wellbeing/work-life balance as a factor of employer branding:

Employer branding and recruitment strategies can, as we saw, be motivated through a global (but also a more regional) competition for skilled professionals. The examples of two Polish organizations illustrate, that the employees' wellbeing has become one of key factors of attractiveness as an employer. One had the goal to become a leading company in this area. For another company, wellbeing is seen as one of its top defining values, "which goes beyond the wellbeing program by addressing the standards which regulate everyday work" (PL: 47). And as Spanish and Slovenian examples show, a pay-back or "win-win" effect is established, as space for care and support is in many interviews regarded as a benefit also for the company: "The loyalty to the company is more important than absenteeism because of care." (SI: 70)

Organizational values

Work satisfaction and wellbeing, as the whole topic of organization culture in general, is often not only an instrument to attract competent workforce, but also driven by the values of an organization, and thus being more integrated in the in-house mainstream culture. These values, in our samples, are often closely connected to care. As the Norwegian report points out,

> Having a company culture based on humanitarian values made the interviewees feel safe and trusted enough to use the WLB measures the company provided. In practical terms, this meant being understanding when male employees had to arrive late or leave early or had sudden changes in the time schedule to take care of children, being able to delegate tasks when employees are absent, not being punished career wise after a longer leave of absence, being encouraged to take care of personal needs, getting compensatory absence for overtime, and in general being able to have an open dialog around WLB measures. The idea of being "in it together" was prominent in the most advanced WLB company (LifestyleCo) and was less

prevalent in departments with a strong competitive culture. Interviewees from companies with less competitive cultures also seemed to feel more trust and job security from their employer, making longer leaves of absence seem less risky. (NO: 47)

In a similar way, organizations in the Slovenian sample try to create a pleasant working culture, which includes good conditions for care. This includes good relations among colleagues and with management. The guiding principle, e.g. in Donar d.o.o., seems to be 'company equals family'. (SI: 70) The relationships in these organizations are based on mutuality, understanding and the search for solutions to problems, which has a positive effect on the acceptance of caring men. (SI: 69)

Solidarity and cultures of care

Mutual support among carers who face similar challenges has been a recurrent topic in the talks with carers. This support can also be more generic, like colleagues supporting carers, knowing that they will receive support when they need it. It can also happen as a vertical exchange of support, like a superior giving leeway for care to their staff, knowing they will be motivated and pay back. This phenomenon of mutual solidarity is discussed in many of the reports at hand, and they are a relevant for a caring organizational environment.

> The workers give to the company the best of themselves, and the company responds by taking care of their needs. Male interviewees who have a caring role but who present contradictory or ambivalent messages regarding care and the use of WLB measures show a higher commitment to their caring role when the organisation formally and actively supports and promotes the caring role of their male workers. (ES: 57)

In Iceland, two companies (Bank and Preschool) have decided to develop proactive approach and take the initiative by encouraging men to take parental leave as long as women do. This company policy is widely known and male carers who have recently had children emphasise that "the supervisors want men to take more parental leave." (IS: 14)

In Slovenian Mikro + Polo d.o.o., additional incentives or benefits that underline a care-positive culture can be recognized in company's canteen, free breakfast for employees, joint sport and social activities, trips and trainings. (SI: 71)

And according to the Polish examples "(w)hat was particularly important in two of the companies in relations between the manager and staff member is 'the speak-up culture' and regular, individual meetings which create a safe environment to discuss the solutions available to an employee and to express their needs." (PL: 48)

The culture among younger (or, regardless of age, more open-minded) managers is correspondingly - a culture of mutual support (in comparable situations): "A PostDoc of similar age (also 2 children) takes over for him if necessary - and vice versa, if he has to pick up his children, he can do that too: *"There is no discussion. Because I simply know that he will pay it back a hundredfold"*. Mutual flexibility is apparently regarded as an unwritten law:

> It doesn't matter when or how he does it. He should organise it in such a way that he does the duties for his wife and children, that is... pick it up, take it somewhere. There is no need to discuss it at all, then he just leaves and that's it. Or when the children come, he works from home and that's it, there is no discussion, that's clear. Because then I know that when I'm stressed, he'll jump in, that's for sure. We can do it (AT: 53).

Gender culture/gendered substructures

In general, it seems to be beneficial that companies take gender equality seriously. The promotion of women is often accompanied by more openness to active fatherhood - if not at the level of concrete measures, then at the level of culture and actors. In Slovenia, even in companies that do not put gender equality front and centre, caring masculinities meet good conditions through a culture of cooperation and solidarity, and a general motivation for diversity and inclusion, regardless of gender (SI: 70).

Support for paternity or sick care leave by male employees and involved fatherhood has been, according to Slovenian interviews, perceived as part of their engagement in family life (SI: 70). This might serve as an approach for more gender conservative surroundings: Where gender equality and non-traditional roles are not so popular, family and family values usually are. So involved fatherhood could also be justified as part of family values rather than equality and 'progressivism' (In the sense that the notion of care is also valuable in conservative, e.g. religious contexts). Even in case of more progressive Iceland, where the notion of gender equality and caring masculinity has been long present in public discourse, the framework of gender equality also highlights family-friendly policies. The importance of a family is stressed through the events which make the family feel as it was a part of the company.

Whether the manager is male or female also needs to be taken into account adding to this already complex picture. In two of the companies, female managers are seen as more willing to discuss and support taking of measures such as care leave. They are seen as more understanding towards male employees as well as recognizing and supporting their needs to a greater extent (PL: 48). The Spanish team asserts

that, in the perspective of the caring respondents, sometimes female managers are seen as more open, while sometimes sex does not seem to matter (ES: 57).

Similar observations can be made in Norway:

> Female representation in managing roles is overall considered important for matters concerning equality. However, the notion of gender equality also in lower level parts of the organization, usually with a large dominance of male workers (like storage work, platform work etc), was not always in focus, thus making WLB-measures typically associated with care less attainable for male workers in male dominated areas of the Company (NO: 46).

As mentioned above (6.1) social environment matters a lot when it comes to gender norms. These outside gender norms, however, can impact the in-house gender culture. While carers at WorkNet referred to gender conservative norms at the Austrian countryside, at (also Austrian) AutoCom and ResearchSchool a rather 'open-minded culture' prevails, also with regard to more modern gender roles fitting to the culture of flexibility, but also to the global search for high potentials. While in most countries caring men were mainly a new or reasonably normalized phenomenon, Norwegian gender norms were framed by a much more egalitarian expectation:

> In all three companies it was commonly expected that fathers as well as mothers picking up and delivering in day care and taking a share in daily household chores. The basic level concept of WLB, like time flexibility and meetings within core hours of the day, is commonly adopted in most sectors in Norway and universally implemented for all employees (NO: 47).

In some cases, carers cite examples of acquaintances from other companies where images of masculinity are more stereotypically based on gainful employment and breadwinner status than in their own workplace. They make remarks like: 'We are in a good position in comparison.' This pattern indicates that a more progressive, care-friendly culture can function as a resource for employer attractiveness.

4. Human factors

Beyond structures and cultures, the dimension of persons and networks interacting are a substantial factor at the workplace in general, and particularly in terms of a care and gender order. We begin with leadership, shift to other actors and departments and point out that networks of change makers are necessary for a transformation towards caring organizations.

Leadership, superiors & management

Managers play a crucial role as gatekeepers for male care roles in the organisations studied, which was pointed out in many interviews.

Two main patterns can be observed here: (1) A more general leadership style or culture that creates space for WLB, and (2) a more direct, personal approach of leaders who care (for their families themselves, or for the carers in their workforce).

(1) The Slovenian report, for instance, highlights that - in both hierarchical and more informal organisations - leaders have a special importance in terms of formal authority (as in the police) or charismatic, moral authority (as in Donar d.o.o.) in implementing work-life and reconciliation policies. Beyond formal programmes and measures, the "sensitivity of the leadership/management about employees' WLB" is essential (SI: 71). Similarly, the Spanish report recognizes "leaders who, in environments with little formal agreement on WLB, fill this gap by informally increasing scope for care, just by allowing more flexibility" (ES: 57)

Male carers interviewed appreciate "the role of managers in building an inclusive and supportive culture based on trust and mutual understanding for all team members, regardless of their family situation and measures used to support their care duties, which aligns with the company values." (PL: 48) Moreover, open-minded managers can help to overcome gender-traditional cultures. Especially when they do not see family care and 'WLB as "detrimental to promotion and career development" (ES: 57). According to the Norwegian report, "Some interviewees ... emphasized the importance of having a leader that was easy to approach when challenges arose. For others, it was important that management approached them with questions on WLB for example during the annual appraisal conversation" (NO: 47).

(2) At Austrian WorkNet, a regime of top-down gender equality is visible, which can also support men and WLB/Care, e.g. by explicit leadership policies which promote care orientation of men. Caring men appreciate "that management is conscious about their life at home, and their obligations to take care of children and that this is explicitly stated as acceptable or even positive" (NO: 48) Also, respondents highlighted, that

> "leaders that were able to see when they were overworked and stepped in and gave the situation attention. Whether this pressure comes from the competitive work culture or competitive work cultures attract people with competitive traits, leaders can still make an effort to have an open dialogue on workloads and risks of burnout. From the interviews, particularly vulnerable periods for men were when they had young children, serious health issues in close family, during a moving period, and during construction work in the home." (ibid.)

In addition, in one of these companies a stronger sympathy for male carers and family-friendly policies has been also observed among managers in a similar family situation (especially in relation to childcare), regardless of their gender. Therefore, sharing similar experiences is a factor facilitating better understanding and support for caring obligation of male employees. (PL: 48) At Austrian ResearchSchool, flexibility and autonomy (which are both necessary in academia) seem to be based on a new leadership generation (sometimes also the responding carers themselves). The interviewees often describe this (and themselves) in contrast to the older generation.

At AutoCom, a similar pattern is visible, which seems more congruent, following the target to become an attractive employer in a small, globalized talent segment. This is appreciated by carers, who usually feel treated with respect and also good care conditions:

> They received everything extremely positively, congratulated me of course and the superior of my current superior said that it is customary for him nowadays to have men taking care of the children. He did that too, and for him it is natural that almost everyone of our age has to do it, so to speak. And accordingly, it is of course something special when someone tells you that directly. (AT: 54)

In Norway, there is a new leadership generation, too, which adapts (and is expected to adapt) to men's care in a context of gender equality:

> It's a very good culture, the former leaders also cared about that, but with the current generation shift it might be getting even better because more of them are in the same situation and have an even larger focus on WLB. More key positions are taken by younger people, with more focus on it. We might even talk more about it during lunch now (NO: 49).

Similar opinions were voiced by the respondents in Iceland who appreciate managers' support and good-will. One of the respondents refers to the personal situation of receiving great sympathy from his manager in difficult time. Such approach had a great impact not only on his leadership style but also is believed to be an example to follow by other managers in the company:

> For example, when my father-in-law passed away, he had a brain tumour and those were difficult times. There was so much support though the whole process. Back then I was not a manager myself, but I was shown all the flexibility I needed. So, when any of my subordinates have had any such situations, then I have shown the same amount of support (IS: 13).

Many respondents felt that a new, more progressive generation of managers might become more relevant. In the Polish organizations studied, "*male carers note the*

increasingly positive approach among managers in the pro-care and pro-equality direction. Their openness to various career paths and staff needs, understanding and support is highlighted and valued." (PL R.: 48) And the Norwegian report states that, "Leaders who challenge traditional gender roles and encourage male care work, especially if those leaders were men, made it easier for our informants to picture themselves in caring roles." (NO: 47). In Iceland, the new way of leadership is especially performed by younger managers who "played a significant role in creating a culture that supports work-life balance. Similarly, the two preschool principals were considered to be role models, as they constantly strived to 'make things easy for us' and 'attend to the employer's needs'" (IS: 15).

Leadership by example is particularly important in the eyes of many interviewees. Managers and superiors have an important role here. If they, sometimes, leave work early to pick up a child at school, avoid meetings outside of core time, avoid sending emails that require answers in the evenings, they set a particular tone that has an impact. Thus, caring roles can be integrated more easily, as the Slovenian report points out: *"As such (role models) co-develop organizational culture, where care is recognized as integral part of employees' life and not as separated part from working life"* (SI: 72).

Other relevant players and networks

Cultural change towards caring masculinities is usually facilitated by different in-house players. The Polish report systemized the following which are mentioned in other national reports as well: (1) bodies responsible for diversity and inclusion, (2) bottom-up networks (e.g. fathers' networks, but also groups dealing with health and resilience) and (3) HR departments (PL: 48f). The Norwegian report mentions gender equality representatives, a working group on WLB, HR departments, a HR development group, or D&I networks as important players. (NO: 48). The roles might be different, but ideally these actors complement each other. According to the Spanish report, "worker representatives' level of commitment to gender and WLB issues is a key factor if supportive measures are to be included in the collective bargaining process and be part of the resulting collective agreement" (ES: 58). The Spanish report also points out two relevant factors in respect to gender equality representatives: If those have more formal power, they have a more positive impact on WLB and care solutions; moreover, for gender experts collaborating in work groups or network in HR or with WLB networks, *"their positive influence is deeper and wider. Their enabling role in promoting gender equality and WLB through measures that are collectively bargained has also been demonstrated in some organisations."* (ES: 58f)

It seems fair to say that networking/communication and collaboration between stakeholders is key.

5. Measures and other factors

Implementation and additional incentives

The way measures are implemented is obviously crucial for how they can be used. As a rule, as noted, rights are an important pivotal point, but their use can also be culturally thwarted, hindered by devaluation or the threat of career losses. In general,

> "… systemic incentives are also needed at the state level and in companies based on the recognition that caring and paid work are inter-related domains in the lives of women and men. This approach in a wider context of equality was recognized in some of the analysed companies." (SI: 70).

In Austrian ResearchSchool, the experts interviewed see the organizations' strength in the individual, case-to-case work-life solutions:

> Something can always be found. This is also written in the info leaflets. The HR department will tell exactly this. They will hand out all information materials and say 'If you do not find something suitable here, we will discuss it again.' There is no great intention to present five different models on the homepage. We rather say, if we solved six or seven special cases, we would solve this one as well (AT: 56).

Communication

Communicating care topics including men is key. The Spanish report – similarly to the Norwegian one (NO: 47) – points out: "A fluid, proactive and periodic internal communication explaining the WLB measures and encouraging men to use them, as well as pointing out the relevance of co-responsibility and of men in caring roles has proved useful." (ES: 60) Communication strategies (all the three companies) – the investigated companies possess developed communication channels (e-mails, dedicated phone lines, online forums, guidelines for parents, online platform) where information concerning the available measures may be found and they adopted several communication strategies in order to promote paternity and parental leave as well as greater involvement of men in care. The communication strategy in Polish Company 2,

> "mainly focuses on showing the benefits of sharing parental leave by both parents (e.g. developing soft skills, preventing burnout and on a family level – creating deeper relations with children), Companies 1 and 3 communicate their openness to

the necessity of managing family life and work or their support for taking up childcare-related leaves in a more general manner" (PL: 56).

And the Norwegian report states that, "(m)aking family care and WLB a normal conversation topic in everyday settings also directed at and initiated by men lowers the bar for bringing up challenges, recent life changes, and the work-life balance in general for men. (NO: 47)

Trainings

Staff at all levels need training of various kinds - from sensitisation to implementation-oriented workshops - in order to be able to integrate the partly new topic of care well. At WorkNet (AT) good practice consists of training on gender stereotypes for employees. This is, on the one hand, positive for internal culture, on the other hand, it has benefits for a more professional client contact. "Gender equality and WLB training for managers and employees has also been proven to change some behaviours and the dynamics in some departments or organisations, by easing a change in their culture in which caring men are more integrated" (ES: 60).

6 Practices of Change in Organisations based on the 3-phases-model

The following chapter aims to comparatively analyse the selected organizations in terms of gender equality and work-life balance. The analytical frame of the organizations studied will be a model of three phases of development towards gender equality[8]. In order to take a close look at the in-house conditions for men's care work, it is not enough to pursue gender equality in the form of a mere head-count (although gender indicators are important as well). Moreover, cultural conditions (substructures, gender stereotypes) and measures - not least in the area of work-life balance and family friendliness - have a high priority here.

These are the three stages, as summarized in the Austrian report (AT: 34):

"Stage 1 (early): Gender and according inequalities are mostly ignored, care is not at all seen as an issue that might be related to work or call for measures. Usually, gender traditional behaviour is expected. Men in active caring roles are mostly unknown and/or receive "othering" or sanctions. First considerations and small

---

[8] Holter Ø. G., Riesenfeld V. & Scambor E. (2005). ‚We don't have anything like that here!' – Organisations, Men and Gender Equality [So etwas haben wir nicht! - Organisationen, Männer und Gleichstellung]. In R. Puchert , M. Gärtner & S. Höyng (eds.), *Work Changes Gender. Men and Equality in the Transition of Labour Forms* (pp. 73 - 104). Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

steps towards gender equality take place, kindergarten etc. ... the link between gender women and care is evident.

Stage 2 (middle): Gender Trouble is visible. Gender (in)equality is seen as an issue that usually causes conflicts and requires measures and resources (which are started to being tried out). Carers, also men, have some (individual) scope.

Stage 3 (advanced): Gender equality and work-life/work-family policies are regarded a necessary part of HR policies. Care is not only about women/mothers, but also about men (and not only about children, but also about care for sick, disabled and seniors). Measures are structural and relational, so that employees don't feel they have to "beg" or fight for reconciliation/balance options."

Of course, this is an abstract and approximate model, and most organizations show different stages according to departments. However, tendencies might become clearer.

In the MiC sample, most organizations are to be found in the middle phase, which is not surprising: Looking for good practice examples and workplaces with caring men employees, it was clear that organizations are already "on their way" and mostly beyond phase 1 and the bar for phase 3 is quite high and a goal hard to reach.

1. Early phase on the leap to middle phase companies

While, as mentioned, 'pure' early phase organizations cannot be expected in a good practice sample, some carers mentioned underdeveloped constellations, such as superiors who were ignorant towards caring men. At ResearchSchool, even an Austrian middle phase company on the leap to the advanced phase, the majority of male carers reported supportive experiences with their superiors. Some carers described a 'paradigm shift': While younger supervisors are more flexible, the older generation insist more strongly on spatial presence in the office, as one male carer reports:

> You have to be in the office a lot, I'm being sarcastic, warm up the air. It doesn't matter if you don't get anything done, you're physically present, only then you work. You had to break that up, that's just the way it is, it took a bit of time, you have to be honest.

It was evident at ResearchSchool that the mind-set was changing. In this process of change a self-confident approach seemed helpful in terms of a more flexible conduct: *"You have to teach them slowly and carefully that it is not a bad thing, but has positive sides. (...) I am completely different. I tell my people where, when and how they work is irrelevant. The work must happen."*

Also, at Co2 (Spain), barriers at top management level, characterized by a patriarchal culture, which leads to the situation that men working in central services have more difficulty in using WLB measures because of being close to management who acts as a "*brake*".

First ideas towards gender equality are linked to women while men are in a neutralized, often hegemonic position that is unquestioned (Acker: ideal worker). This characterizes first phase organisations in which men in caring roles are not common but have a pioneer role, based on rather unbalanced and insecure conditions (Holter et al. 2005).

In first phase organisations, horizontal as well as vertical gender segregation is evident. In the MiC sample, AutoCom (Austria) is a first phase company on the leap to phase two. It appears as a typical company in automotive business in Austria, with a low share rate of women in the tech field and accordingly a low share of women managers. Some effort has been made to integrate women in tech occupations at AutoCom but the company is still far away from gender diversity on all levels.

Early phase companies are characterised by a low or even no support for caring masculinities and "*isolated relational changes, often working mainly on an informal and personal level*" (Holter et al. 2005: 89). AutoCom has been allocated between the early and middle phase of change with an overall lack in gender equality. The fulfilment of top management tasks is still equated with "extreme sports", which also means that these tasks can only be performed independently of caring roles. On the other side, caring roles of men and structural work-life flexibility are visible to some extent, mostly based on informal agreement. According to the men in caring roles the culture of the company appears open-minded, flexible and family-friendly, opposed to stereotypes of a male-dominated, technical field. Besides measures on self-care and (mental) health, in-house childcare, flexible time and space options as well as generous leave and compensation measures.

Where do the driving forces for change come from? According to an HR expert at AutoCom, a knowledge-based organization globally competing for human resources, it important to offer a supportive environment for employee (comfortable, apply knowledge and creativity). AutoCom reflects mixed care practices (flexible, but not yet for higher management levels), and some changes towards more caring masculinities are visible. Two drivers seem to move these changes: First, a number of employees with a progressive, equality-oriented mind-set (reducing working time, living non-breadwinner arrangements); second, an outcome-oriented, pragmatic management culture which is open to the flexibility concerns of this group. However, according to the HR expert, more of a cultural change in management is necessary to reach an open and creative environment.

Moreover, gender equality and caring masculinities need more effort on a structural level in order to reach the middle phase of change.

2. Middle phase companies

The transition from a ,gender neutral '(Acker, 2013) to a gender aware and more sensitive organisation especially concerning WLB and to some extend also the role of men as carers can be initiated by different reasons and motivations for change:

It can be caused by the establishment of a gender equality unit, as result of the municipal gender mainstreaming policy whose capacity to impact depends based on the political approach of the Director of LPC, a local public company in the branch of cultural and touristic activities in Spain.

It can have been strengthened by the necessity to implement Gender Mainstreaming policies during the late 1990s, through which men were addressed for the very first time in connection with gender equality at WorkNet (Austria), based on feminist equality discourses.

It can be motivated by the goal of being an employees' friendly company (including WLB but not gender equality) considered as a competitive advantage on the market (Mikro+Polo d.o.o., Slovenia).

It can be forced due to a staff of globally rare and highly skilled professionals.

It can be caused by the entry of women and female leadership which mainly influenced the shift from "macho culture" to a more gender sensitive organizational approach involving also WLB measures (including self-care) at the Police in Slovenia.

It can be caused by significant efforts which have been made in Co3 (Spain) to turn a former masculinized multinational industrial company into a gender diverse company, in which younger people and women entering management positions.

Under such conditions it is easier for employees to reconcile paid and unpaid work. Although in some intermediate management positions there is still resistance in Co3 (Spain) – which can the taken for granted in change processes (Doppler, 2006) - it can be said that the management is committed to equality, diversity and care:

> The company is focused on results, on the one hand, but it is also part of the company culture to take care of others (employees). The company values that its employees take care of their loved ones, because it is part of the day to day. We are human beings with a personal life, we are not machines. It is important (for the

company) that the employees are happy and balance the work and private part of each one (Co3, Spain).

Also, other companies in the MiC analysis put a focus on care as a human norm (Fraser, 1996), a core value for a healthy environment and a relevant indicator for win-win perspectives for both employees and employer:

> If we look narrowly economically, it is definitely a cost that can be calculated very quickly. Unlike the vast majority, I do not look at it that way because it's short-lived. I look at it on the long run. That is, someone who has had the opportunity to dedicate himself to his family and the company has made it possible for him his affiliation with the company and, consequently, the results of his work are so much better (Saubermacher-Komunala Murska Sobota d.o.o., Slovenia).

"**Caring Companies**" can be characterized by a strong focus on win-win perspectives, as illustrated by the following quote of interviewee in leadership position at the Police (Slovenia): "*After all, I'm a parent myself, I have 4 kids and I know how it goes. In fact, if you have family life, that you know that if everything is fine at home, then you are also more relaxed at work. If you know that the system allows you to reconcile, you also feel more committed to the system.*"

Gender equality measures in middle phase companies are often mainly directed towards to the support of women. Men may be recognized as well, but usually not involved in an active way. In some of the companies analysed caring roles of men seemed to be enabled in order to improve the situation of women.

Male dominated culture and macho environment still exist in companies analysed but at the same time changing mind-sets are evident. EnergyCo in Norway was described as a male dominated culture in parts of the organization, although long term strategies to increase the numbers of young women (support to STEM-education) or measures which support diversity and inclusion (networks for women, LGBTIQ-people and a forum for employees with disabilities) have been implemented. Even though the company is outspoken on values like diversity, equality and inclusion, both the experts and male employee in the MiC study referred to a "macho culture" within the organization, especially amongst the older employees. This leaves this company with some challenges and potential improvement points to be able to advance into a more WLB-friendly company for male carers.

In other cases, companies seemed to see themselves as resonance bodies for gendered patterns in society. We can see that WLB measures at Saubermacher-Komunala Murska Sobota d.o.o. (Slovenia) are understood as a win-win situation for employer and employee. Introduction of flexible working hours allows employees to work under less stress thus supports carers to balance paid and unpaid (family)

work better. This measure is available to all employee, but field workers are not able to use it. WLB measures are gender neutral, however socially expected to be used by women. As emphasized in the interview with the leadership, men take paternity and/or sick leave, and by that also the mind-set is slowly changing:

> "In a way, we are still a very traditional society here, where the prevailing mentality is that primarily women's responsibility is to take care of children, and men are the ones who have to take care of the family's existence. But even in the company we notice that more and more men are taking paternity leave, that in some way even in the case of a child's illness it is the father who asks for leave because the mother for one reason or another cannot. So, slowly this mindset is also changing here in the environment where we operate and in the company".

The concept of gender equality or caring masculinities are not prevailing in the company (neither at the management nor at employees' level).

In some cases, we found **traditional and progressive gender orientations coexisting in the same companies**, pulling in different directions. These different orientations lead to different possibilities for caring roles of men. In some cases, gender traditional attitudes at top management level hinders reconciliation of paid work und unpaid care work in other cases it is more the gender conventional attitude of employees.

Co2 in Spain has made efforts to change the working schedules of employees working in central services and of supervisors of telephone and road assistance, in order to make it easier for them to reconcile work and family life (shortened lunchtime, more flexibility in entering and leaving, change shifts with colleagues informally). The company has also created a diversity department where equality, work-life balance and LGBTI policies are brought together. At the same time there are barriers to WLB and gender equality at the management level, especially at the top level where a patriarchal culture persists. Therefore, men working in central services have more difficulty in using WLB measures because of being close to the top management who acts as "brake". In this case a patriarchal culture represented in top management and on the other hand the innovation that is imposed thanks to the perspective of some leaders with a transformative vision coexist and lead to different care opportunities for employees:

> "In central services men ask less for conciliation measures, I think that is because they are very close to the managers who can act as a barrier (…) In some cases, they have made it a little bit difficult. There are directors who hinder [Men's Care]. In the telephone assistance platforms and the mechanics there are more workers [and] the directors are further away… and it falls within their rights. In central services it is not so well seen to claim rights from the director"

WorkNet in Austria serves as an example for a more progressive orientation at the top-level coexisting with more gender conventional attitudes on the employee's side. WorkNet has a long history in gender equality with a strong focus on women in management positions and has started to implement Gender Mainstreaming during the late 1990s, focussing on women and (for the first time) men, based on feminist equality discourses. Among the managers, there is some awareness about the importance of caring masculinities, while at the same time men on paternity leave and male active carers are less represented. A special focus on men has been added in recent years, while not yet reflected deeper in the corporate culture. This became evident in interviews with male carers, who referred to male leaders who do not seem to advocate men's role in gender equality, care and change. Furthermore, hints to verbal modernization towards caring masculinities became evident, when male carers were not able to name concrete measures. So the question arises if the measures really reach the target group or if these measures are taken for granted and are not really identified by these carers, although they are helpful. The prevailing mind-set of the carers interviewed seems rather gender-conservative:

> "Despite all modern approaches with equal rights and that I want to get involved, of course, I said that the main decision should lie with the mother. So, I have a traditional image of family and motherhood. And above all my wife should have the freedom of choice. And I have just said that I can choose all kinds of leave of absence from work with my employer without anything happening to me, and she should say how she wants it. And since my wife basically loves to work, she said that she would like to go back after one year at the latest. So we quickly negotiated to use the 12+2 option." (12 months for one, 2 for the other partner – one out of many models in Austria) (WorkNet: carer 1, kids: 0.5, 3y)

Although many measures are available at WorkNet, which indicate a rather advanced stage (e.g. "care bonus" in job application), there are still significant deficits at various levels: involving men in gender policies, addressing them as carers, but also methods to address gender-conservative and inegalitarian cultures. So WorkNet altogether is still at medium level.

In some companies, we found top leaders and employees prepared, but barriers in the middle management:

> "The barriers are not so much in the top management as in some middle managers who still do not understand that "reconciling does not mean working less but it means working differently (...) It is true that at the middle management level they are the ones who can be most affected in the organization and management of their teams, because there they have to have more influence, mentalize, ... because the staff in charge ask them to change their schedules, they have an additional workload

because they have to reorganize ... but in the long run it is for the benefit of the company." (Co3, Spain)

In companies allocated to the second phase, men in caring roles are not isolated cases and are not devalued or discriminated against, which is very important not only for these particular men carers, but also for the whole gender culture. Nevertheless, we found a pattern, which can be described as **WLB for all employees, but men's caring roles are not talked about** '. Men can take papa month, paternity leave, fathers leave or reduce work time in most cases, but caring roles of men are usually not a topic of discussion in everyday work. At LifestyleCo in Norway though open dialog is about WLB and limitations against overwork is a value, male interviewees report that their or other men's care commitments or family life most often was not talked about in their everyday work life. This could sometimes result in some expectations towards the men in the company to work at "odd" hours, in the evening or in vacations. One of the partners of a male employee said specifically that his partners "*company should have fewer long meetings*" and that the male employee sometimes was "*called to meetings at five o'clock, which makes it a necessary for us to organize extra so that we can pick up in the kindergarten, and that it would have been best if it could have been avoided*".

A similar pattern is evident at FinanceCo (Norway). Welfare measures (e.g. 20 weeks of paid parental leave) and WLB measures are comprehensive and universal, and many of these apply to, or are adapted for employees in offices abroad, where such measures do not exist. On the other side, masculinity and men are not addressed in welfare and WLB policies. A universal thinking about WLB that includes male employees appears to be unevenly implemented in the organisation. The overall picture from the study is that many of the male employee referred of good and supportive dialogues with their closest leader, and find good adaptations, but the needs and dilemmas is not something that is shared with colleagues but is individual and kept to themselves.

> "In one department, it's not a problem that you come a little later one morning because of an event, for instance that the kid has injured itself or something like that. So, there is a lot of understanding in some departments, but in other departments it may be different because there are male leaders who are 55 who have never been home with the children. But there are differences here too, some have been at home with the children, while others have not and think that the wife is at home to take care of children and of everything else at home as well, and that the job of the man is to work and earn money, and they do not have the same understanding."

The biggest obstacle for men to use the WLB measures is a lack of cultural support, a consensus that it is okay to use the measures. Top management has not sent out

a clear signal. Pioneers, men, and women exist, but role models in top management using WLB are in short supply.

Although men are not isolated cases anymore, we still can see that in most companies **more women than men take up WLB measures**, with a great variety between countries (high rates of men taking fathers leave in Norwegian companies and low rates in other countries, such as Austria or Poland).

At the finance service company (1) in Poland, the share of men who take-up long care-leaves is rather very small when compared to women. While maternity and parental leaves are usually not shared, short-term leaves for dependents, including children are taken by male employees quite often. Although the company declares supporting caring masculinities its initiative is mainly limited to informing about possibilities of sharing leaves, and **leaving decision to individuals**. Care leaves for other (relatives) than children are rather not mentioned/promoted by the company and not taken up by employees. Although the company offers an open and supportive culture for caring masculinities it lacks initiatives encouraging men to taking up the leaves and caring roles (for instance by providing special benefits for caring men, providing caring role-models). Therefore, more involvement of company for GE issues and caring masculinities would be needed.

Based on results of middle phase organisations, we found different driving forces into the direction for gender equality and to some extend also touching the role of men in this process. Summarizing the results we can differentiate between four types of causes, although we would like to point out right away that several driving forces may well be at work in one company.

> Type 1: **Gender-equality driven** (WorkNet etc.) companies mainly point into the direction of women. Men benefit when women profit. Men may be explicitly addressed but organisational structures lack.

> Type 2: **Care-value driven**, employee friendly (Saubermacher-Komunala Murska Sobota d.o.o. etc.). WLB measures very much depend on leadership. The focus on family is evident, while at the same time there is possibly too little structure for caring masculinity implemented.

> Type 3: **Productivity-competition driven** (AutoCom etc.). Productivity is often still too closely associated with traditional masculinity. Women and female as well as male carers have too little space (at the top) or no chance.

> Type 4: **Progress-innovation driven** (Co3 etc.). Companies characterized by innovation, progress, open-mindedness and generational change. Nevertheless, traditional male culture may be replaced by a more open mind-set, the role of caring men may still be insecure and individualised.

3. Middle phase companies on the leap to advanced phase companies and advanced phase companies

While work is still differentiated from private life duties in the middle phase, we find a more integrated perspective in advanced phase companies. Paid work is considered as a completion of private tasks, WLB is a structurally integrated perspective and directed to all genders. Relevant indicators for male dominance in companies - such as overtime-culture of care-independency (Acker, 2006, 2013) - are critically reflected and working conditions support the integrated perspective of paid and unpaid work.

Equality policies in advanced phase companies include a critical perspective on men 'privilege in society and in companies on the one side, but also strengthen caring roles of men through pointing towards the improvement of opportunities – a one-sided orientation towards paid labour should make way for a more balanced perspective.

One indicator for an integrated perspective of men and gender equality is the fact, that men do not have to justify their caring roles in advanced phase companies. No fairness and justice argument is needed for men who take care *"a common reason seems to be ‚good enough "* (Holter et al. 2005: 96).

Men are named when gender equality is addressed. The support of active fatherhood, reduction of overtime work as well as self-care measures are evident topics. It is no longer the case that men 's benefit from gender equality is reduced to a side-effect of gender equality measures directed towards women, which can be found in first phase and is still evident in middle phase companies.

Some companies in the MiC sample are middle phase companies with a leap to the advanced phase. At ResearchSchool (Austria) we see a relatively high number of male carers in a care positive environment and almost all interviewee report on the informal flexibility in working hours. This flexibility, however, depends on the attitudes of superiors and seems to be gradually modernizing. On the other hand, one of the major work-life and care challenges is typical for the whole field of academia: As a sociologist Funken put it at an Austrian conference on careers at universities, *"in academia, careers are for those who receive pulls from the inside and pushes from the outside"*, meaning that successfully combining caring duties and career is highly improbable in this area. The reason for this is deeply rooted in the mission and structure of research and knowledge production: The field is determined by the mode of total commitment to the cause, to which the protagonists have to submit if they want to succeed. Nevertheless, ResearchSchool is classified as a middle phase organisation with the leap to the advanced phase because culture and structure apparently enable men to do care work and also support special self-care measures from which especially men should benefit (psychosocial support, men 's health, etc.).

At Co4, a semi-public transport company in Spain, many men take advantage of the facilities to reconcile work and family life. Although the share of women in management and in male-dominated occupations leads to fact that Co4 could be situated in an

intermediate phase, compared to the Spanish context, in many aspects it is close to an advanced phase. High salaries, easy adjustment and reduction of working hours, measures to reconcile work and family life are consolidated and integrated in collective bargaining. All these make it easier for men to reconcile work and family life, even in jobs with rotating shifts.

Also, Co5 (Spain) has made important efforts to achieve parity in the positions of responsibility which leads to an allocation in the advanced phase in the MiC sample. One of the experts referred to the process of change in gender equality:

> "At first the equality plans were aimed at the women of the company to help them reconcile and little by little they have been incorporating the issue of co-responsibility (of men) because otherwise what they were doing was perpetuating gender roles. An example of this is that the company, from the beginning, has offered more weeks of paternity leave than is required by law".

Co5 is a company with a culture of care, health and well-being of its employees among its objectives. It has many measures that allow for the reconciliation of work and family life and some specific measures for men (extension of paternity leave). Men in this company can take advantage of the measures without fear of being penalised, although there are more women than men who apply for them. The reason for this is external to the company and has to do with stereotypes, relative resources within the couple (gender gap) and the self-limitation of men. For this reason, the company plans to hold courses on masculinity for men. "*The existence of this sensitized managing director has made it easier for HR to develop this egalitarian organizational culture. The manager has been a reference and an example on these issues. The leadership chain and middle managers have had to follow the example they have seen in the manager.*"

Company 3 (Poland) was awarded prizes recognising its efforts in relation to creating good work conditions as well as is endorsing initiatives in relation of gender equality. Women constitute 60% among directors and leaders in the company, also men engagement in care is vocalised in the company, even if the company does not provide any tailored solutions for employees in relation to caring masculinities. The framework for talking about men engagement in care and work life-balance in general seems to be widely related to a general value framework of the company endorsing such values as respect, inclusion, diversity. Care is very important in regard to diverse activities and relations – company caring for its workers, HR office taking care of employees, managers caring for their team, workers taking care for their own wellbeing and having competences to manage work and care for their families. Care in relation to men is related mostly to their role of a father, but some measures relate to general well-being/self-care/health. Promoting a speak up culture, openness towards discussing care arrangement and one's wellbeing can be seen as an important context for men engagement in care. As the role of the manager here is important and much is based on their attitudes, the access to some solutions/measures may be still person-dependent.

Summarising, the company culture seems to create a safe environment for work-life balance. There are events that directly communicate the values of men engagement in care for children and their families, as well as self-care. The awareness of culture in relation to care and its impact on care uptake is noticeable, still the company does not offer any particular/tailored tools to support caring masculinities. It is not possible to judge on the basis of our research if short tenure workers, in operational positions have the same access to solutions in comparison to those in long tenure and on specialist and managerial positions. Therefore, the company is between medium and upper level.

4. Reflections on the model

In 2005, the WCG research teams had a similar approach, looking for best practices (while at that time, we were rather looking for men in different positions and gender equality than care). We found more organisations in phase 1, and less on the passage to phase 3. The main reason seems to be, that the cultural (and to some extent, practical) gender care gap within these organizations got smaller. Men are now regarded as potential carers – for more organisations, in most countries, this is the new norm, since involved fatherhood became a visible topic in many countries, laws were introduced and sometimes measures implemented.

What is still missing seems threefold: The implementation of measures is still very cautious and sketchy in most organisations, it is not systemic (and continuously connected to gender equality and HR strategies), and it seems completely focused on fatherhood, while other aspects of care are still invisible (which is overwhelmingly represented in the sample at hand).

7   Care during the COVID-19 epidemic

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the work conduct as well as the understanding and practices of WLB. As it is noted in the Austrian report: "Corona appeared to be a 'game changer' in terms of living and working conditions. This emerged not only due to care requirements (home schooling, closed kindergartens), but also because of the local flexibility of work. This is particularly visible in the case of the home office: where there was previously a lack of flexibility and a restrictive approach to it, there was now no way around it if companies wanted to minimise the risk of infection" (AT: 62). All studied countries responded to the COVID-19 outbreak, although the measures implemented by the governments have varied, responding to the local conditions, namely infection and disease rate, timing of measures and available resources. The pandemic and the changes at the national level have forced companies to on the one hand safeguard employees, but on the other – to secure financial gains, mitigate the risk caused by COVID-19 and provide continuity for their services. While cases of having heavier workload were reported (ES COVID-19), many companies decided to lower their productivity (PL).

Although the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and the first lockdown came as a surprise, the companies and the employees developed diverse coping strategies. At the national level, the governments in all countries implemented special regulations, including more

sick days to care for children covered from the social security (i.e. not paid by the employer) such as in Norway and Poland or a compensation for the salary for parents who stayed at home due to childcare as in Slovenia. Some companies, such as Company 1 in Poland, offered additional compensation to cover the difference between the compensation paid by social insurance and the regular salary.

All companies also offered flexible work arrangements. The studied companies in Norway and Poland rather smoothly went to the re-organization of their work from office-based work to remote work. The companies had already developed flexible work arrangements, making the companies better prepared to offer technical solutions (such as hardware and software) enabling employees to work remotely from their homes. The implementation of flexible work arrangements was also easier in white-collar job, but as the Slovenian analysis shows, the companies Donar d.o.o. and Mikro + Polo d.o.o. organised their production in rotation to limit the number of employees present at the premises of the companies at the same time (Sl: 70).

The first lockdown was also a challenge for male employees. As never before, they were exposed to care and domestic work which affected their ability to work. In all countries, the feeling of being overburden was the common experience during that time. They complained on difficulties with providing high quality of childcare, inability to support their children with the school tasks but also on conflicts with partners, tiredness as well as lack of time for their professional development and projects necessary for their promotion. Although the carers strongly agreed that it was not possible to balance professional work and care, they developed various strategies to try to reconcile both areas. Their strategies included using flexible working hours (working in the morning or/and late in the evening) (PL: 48, ES COVID-19), well-planned but flexible division of care and work between parents (Sl: 70, PL: 48), taking turns to work and look after children (PL: 48), taking annual leave (Sl: 70), taking paternity leave (Sl: 70). Some of these individual strategies proved to support the companies as they experienced cost savings as in a case described in the Austrian report: *"the Papa month was economically a gift to the company, that has to be said. I didn't receive a salary for a month, which of course helps in a tense economic situation"* (AT: 63). While in most cases the male carers combined care and professional work, some male employees were not involved in care as their partners took care of children and stayed at home with them (Sl: 70) and others – those whose partners performed "essential work" and were not able to work remotely – had the care arrangements reversed and became the main carer (PL: 48, AT: 60). The latter also involved staying with or moving in with relatives so they could support parents in childcare (PL: 48).

The reports on Poland (PL: 48-49) and Norway (NO: 55) mention also positive effects of COVID-19 pandemic – both on individual and company level. The former focuses on developing better relations with children and partner/wife as well as fostering greater awareness of own healthy lifestyle, wellbeing and quality of life while the latter refers to work performance. The pandemic proved that implementing flexible work arrangement does not negatively impact the overall productivity (NO: 54, AT: 60, PL: 48-49), which has also positively changed the approach to flexible work arrangements among managers. It also broadened the understanding of care itself as connected not only to childcare, but also

care for and about other dependents, relatives, friends, and oneself (PL: 49). Thus, despite the difficulties experienced by employees, it seems that the workplace will never be the same and the measures rapidly implemented during pandemic will be offered on on-going basis reaching this goal is possible only if proper trainings, coordination and communication of new forms of work will be guaranteed.

8 Conclusion and Recommendations

Through the findings from MiC research on caring masculinities in six countries this report discusses the role of organizations in supporting men in undertaking care duties. By reaching organizations across different sectors operating as public, private, or non-profit entities which already implemented some good practices in terms of reconciliation of care and professional work, we found out that organizations have become more interested in supporting caring masculinities. We distinguished three main dimensions of barriers and supportive factors, which constitute a remedy to the challenges described by the male carers and professionals in the organizations. The structural conditions cover the size and location of organization, working structures, work responsibilities and access to WLB measures. These factors build the working structures proving that more diverse companies with higher number of employees and variety of WLB policies tend to have more pronounced solutions towards caring masculinities while inability to substitute an employee, inequal access to WLB measures as well as blurred boundaries between work and private life while using flexible work arrangements and heavy workload negatively affect the company's support for the involvement of men in care. Equally important are cultural factors. From this perspective, the organizational culture and gender culture are key to understand the opportunities for male employees to combine work and care. On the one hand, the lack of speak up culture and clear communication strategy increasing the awareness of solutions as well as hegemonic masculinity illustrate an insufficient recognition and low commitment of the company to values promoting care. On the other hand, when it comes to supporting male carers, our study points to culture of security, culture of diversity and inclusion as well as gender equality as driving mechanisms. Finally, the degree to which organization supports caring masculinities is determined by human factors, namely by managers/direct superiors, HR/GE/D&I representatives, trade unions and employees' networks. Technocratic, inflexible and restrictive type of management negatively affects policies and measures supporting male carers while inclusive and supportive leadership facilitate gender equality and caring masculinities.

The identification and examination of these factors is a starting point for the assessment of the development of organization towards gender equality and its allocation in the three phases model developed in the Work Changes Gender project. The MiC "best practice" organizations have recognised the needs of male carers and address them in a framework of gender equality, WLB and care policies. These organizations are located mostly in the middle phase: they have already overcome the structural, cultural and human barriers as a result of initiatives taken by both male employees and organizations. Yet, due to uneven impact of supportive and hindering conditions, few companies are also on the leap from the early to middle phase or from middle to the advance phase.

The companies which are on the leap to the middle phase face mostly barriers related to the cultural factor. The progress towards gender equality and caring masculinities is hindered by the traditional mind-set and ignorant approach among superiors. This is also strongly linked with the patriarchal culture which affects the company culture and working structures. The change is also prevented due to horizontal and vertical segregations and

therefore a lack in gender equality and a need for greater diversity and inclusion of women on a leadership and managerial position. Male carers are not common and there is little support for caring masculinity, often based on informal agreement. While answering the question: what motivate the companies to transition to middle phase, the MiC study reveals four types of driving forces. The companies can be gender-equality driven, care-value driven, productivity-competition driven or progress-innovation driven. Depending on the strongest factor causing change, the studied companies has differently addressed caring masculinities and offer different type of support. Despite these differences, the companies in the middle phase also share some similarities. They are usually more diverse companies which also focus on equality and inclusion. The progressive gender orientation, however, coexists with more traditional or gender-conservative approach in some companies. This tension occurs both among employees and at the top level, hindering the reconciliation of work and care. As a result, the organizations face insufficient implementation of measures directed at caring masculinities and weak recognition of other aspects of care besides fatherhood. The WLB measures are offered to all employees and are based on the individual decision whether and how they will be used. Therefore, reaching WLB is associated more with individual behaviours leading to providing more support for women than men. Only in the companies which are on their way to advance level we can observe more male carers among employees and more use of WLB by men. The most important factor supporting this change is related to the company culture which creates save environment for using WLB. Yet, even in the more advanced companies there are no tailored measures for caring masculinities.

As pointed out in the chapters before, many workplace conditions are important for men to take up more care work, such as access to flexible work models, a care-positive work culture and especially support from their superiors. In this chapter, we aim to more systematically specify our recommendations for different levels of workplace changes.

However, we start with environmental conditions that are not (or only peripherically) subject to companies' decisions but will have an impact at the workplace as well.

1. Society, politics and legislation

> **Suitable legislation** is a key precondition. Individual, non-transferable and fully paid Parental leave and the right for (parental) part time/work reduction, and flexible employee-driven home office, protection against dismissal and similar legal conditions that guarantee a high income maintenance are the basis. Here common directives like the EU Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers are a common basis for further differentiation at country level. While in some of the participating countries good incentive systems for fathers are already in place (e.g. Iceland), other countries are lagging behind with financially unattractive fathers leave or papa month systems (e.g. Austria).

> Furthermore, more security for men in using WLB measures can be expected from **collective agreements**, provided they recognise the caring responsibilities of men.

> **Public (financial) support** for work-life and care-positive initiatives that promote solutions and good practice examples on a national or regional level is needed. Publicly supported initiatives like Audits on Work and Family (which exists in some of the participating countries) usually put the focus on women and mothers. Therefore, an additional focus on men should be introduced – men should be named when work-life-balance is on the agenda.

> **Initiatives and networks** (e.g. Bundesforum Männer in Germany, DMÖ in Austria) on men and gender equality can contribute an important share, if governmental support is provided. These initiatives or organisations are suitable resource centres and service agencies for employers and employees also on topics of work, care and fatherhood.

2. Flexible work & leave structures

> For some carers, **spatial flexibility** (mobile work, home office) can help a lot to avoid commuting and be closer to the ones they care for. Thus, traditional work cultures based on office time, presence and availability should be reflected and reduced to the necessary minimum. The pandemic was a game changer, since many employers had to or chose to allow working from home (especially highly skilled work). However, a closer look should be taken also to jobs with a high level of presence (not every work needs to be done face-to-face). Increased use of home office and telework have possible downsides that need to be contracted. Blurred lines between work-time and leisure-time and invisible overwork may require employees' right to disconnect and routines of communication between leaders and employees and between colleagues must ensure promotion possibilities for teleworkers.

> **Reduction of worktime as a key intervention.** General reduction of working time would be helpful to reach a cultural shift and to avoid the "othering" and exotisation of those who reduce work for care reasons. Currently, some companies are trying out a four-day working week while staying on the same pay, and some experts prefer a reduction of the working day within a five-day working week[9]. Furthermore, job-sharing and reduction of work hours should also work on management levels.[10]

> **Alternative work models** involving shortening the time spent away from home and combining work hours with school hours, such as unbroken shifts, morning shifts, reduction in lunch time, also greatly facilitate WLB. Increasingly, societies demand a rationalisation of working and school hours designed around a family model of two providers and carers. Time flexibility, as well as possibilities for telework (when possible) should be communicated as an option, and management should model this themselves.

---

[9] Veal, A. (2020). A life of long weekends is alluring, but the shorter working day may be more practical (https://theconversation.com/a-life-of-long-weekends-is-alluring-but-the-shorter-working-day-may-be-more-practical-127817)

[10] Jobsharing is especially popular in Switzerland: https://dievolkswirtschaft.ch/de/2017/04/krone-germann-05-2017/; there are Swiss and German platforms that promote this, also for leadership positions: https://wejobshare.ch/en/the-job-sharing/, and https://www.tandemploy.com/. A project in Germany studied the conditions of and experiences with flexible work models for leaders and managers: .

> Employees who choose to reduce their working hours to accommodate family needs should be relieved of some of their duties so that their **workload fits the reduction** in hours. A solution is good management and communication of expectations. Superiors should receive support from upper management and HR.

> **Substitution arrangements** in case of longer absences should be **clarified** – it needs proper management. If colleagues are burdened with extra work without prior communication, this is not only negative for their work. It also leads to care work being blocked. Ultimately, this will have an equally negative impact on motivation and work processes.

> Working time accounts and annual working time models support long-term flexibility: They make it possible to accumulate working hours over the week, the month or the year and allowing this time to be used for personal purposes when needed (**hours exchange system**) and offering paid leave, either as **days of free disposal** throughout the year and/or as other formal leave for WLB reasons (care for relatives, educational purposes, etc.).

3. Improved knowledge and communication at company level

Apart from the listed implementation of flexible work models, a number of other measures can be proposed to enable men to take up more care work:

> To promote caring masculinities, companies should design their **own company specific WLB plan for male employees** to ensure that they take up parental leave and other care tasks. Sensitization and training of stakeholders (as proposed below) might be a necessary part of this plan in order to change towards a care-friendly work culture. WLB measures also need to address elderly care and care for sick relatives on a systemic level.

> **Self-care and employees' (mental) health** could be a topic of routine internal conversation. Managers should know about the connection between mental health, work motivation and productivity.

> Companies should introduce **WLB material with a gender diverse target group** in mind, including and promoting company measures also for men (also on websites/intranet). Especially topics like paternity-leave and leave to take care of sick relatives should be described, also using and addressing men in images, icons, language and so forth. Also, lgbtqi-friendly language should be used.

> **Information flow about available measures and regulations** could be shared more often:

  ▪ The topic of WLB measures in the companies could be added to the regular (at least monthly) staff meetings agenda.

  ▪ Information about leave regulations, pros and cons of papa month, transition from educational leave to parental leave.

- Clear informants: HR/staff management seem to need better training here.

- The universal set of measures for all the employees are impossible, thus it is very important to have a broader list of possible measures available among which each employee can select or adjust to current care needs. It is relevant to consider variety of working places/positions and to adapt measures to particular working places. For example, work from home was mentioned as a recommendation, but it is a possible measure only for some working places.

> An **image campaign on fatherhood** and get fathers out from behind the curtain (name them on the website) should increase the attractiveness of papa month, paternity leave and parental part-time for men.

> **HR/career development**: Companies should always have at least one question about their employees WLB-situation in the annual appraisal conversation, preferably formulated as an open question like: "How do you think your job here has matched your obligations in other areas of life in the past year?", as well as "Is there anything we can do to accommodate the needs you have with regards to care work at home?"

> HR should **monitor the take-up rate of care leave** (like paternity leave) and care-related work models (part time, working time reduction, job-sharing, home office etc.) across departments and managerial levels, and actively use the result to stimulate a higher take-up rate. Also questions on care needs and self-care should be part of the routine employee surveys. Employers should encourage and make policies for a more equal share of parental leave beyond this minimum norm.

> **Yearly employee-surveys** on work environments should **include questions on WLB** and "heroes culture"[11]. These surveys should also scrutinize and adapt the design of the organisations, so that leaders are in position to have the overview of the total workload of the employees.

> Create space in the company for men to debate their engagement in care by e.g. encouraging the development of **fathers' groups and networks of caring men,** better engaging fathers in networks around wellbeing, parents' network and men in networks of employees caring for sick, disabled or elderly relatives. Therefore time and space for the development of an employee's resource group should be provided.

> Organize **social events for families** to meet in a relaxed setting, because such meetings could further develop empathy and understanding when it comes to using measures related to care.

> **Give voice in companies to women whose partners shared parental leave** – explore the double perspective on sharing parental leave.

---

[11] "The Norwegian report «Bærekraftige familier – Likestilte livsløp" also shows that some work places foster a "Hero Culture" (NO: heltekultur), were constant availability is rewarded, and that an important measure for development is to "take down" these heroes in the work place, and create a culture where balance between work and life is encouraged by both the management and other workers (Rasmussen, Klethagen & Svare, 2010)." (Nordfjell & Hammer 2020: 22).

> **Join other external initiatives** focusing on inclusion or care, task force gathering other companies engaged in those issues to exchange information, debate and look for new measures and solutions.

4. Culture, training & awareness

> The **relation between WLB, security and health at workplace** should be highlighted, because they intertwine. The trainings that will link men, care, gender equality with security and health at the workplace are recommended.

> Depending on the surrounding culture and mind-sets of the interviewees, many carers and other do not really see a connection of caring masculinities and gender equality. **Mutual benefits of gender equality and caring masculinities should be pointed out more clearly**. There could be a stakeholder seminar dedicated particularly on this connection.

> Companies should **promote a speak-up culture**, openness towards discussing care arrangement and men's wellbeing. Because of norms of masculinities, some men, especially in relation to other men in the workplace, may feel uneasy to speak up themselves. For such an effort to work the men in management must be committed, lowering the threshold to be open for male employees.

> **Policy of 'one-to-one meetings'**, the 'speak up, listen up'- and 'open doors'-cultures provide space for discussion and negotiation of one's private and business issues and also encourage employees to talk about their problems, to present new ideas to their supervisors, and discuss the issues connected with caring obligations and best solutions for them.

> **Positive or well-meant initiatives** like a company coach or self-management courses should be assessed, to make sure they do not essentially place the whole WLB burden on the employee themselves, but gives them the means to address potential systemic or cultural deficits in the company, when this is appropriate and needed.

> HR and superiors often lack a sensitisation for carers' needs – and environmental conditions that would meet these needs. Different questions should be addressed with these target groups:

   ▪ Work with superiors on **flexible versus presence cultures**: How much presence is really needed, how much reconciliation/flexibility is possible.

   ▪ Integrate departments in **care conversations** (360-degree-approach), in order to avoid an overload of staff and colleagues.[12]

   ▪ Companies should **integrate a WLB perspective on their policies**, especially by training managers and lower-level leaders in their potential as role models, their possibility to contribute to model learning and the effect of a positive WLB environment for the company and their employees.

---

[12] A closer look at the project FlexShip is recommended: https://www.eaf-berlin.de/en/project/flexible-working-arrangements-in-leadership/.

5. Leadership and networks

> Gender equality and diversity representatives or departments are drivers or enablers of caring masculinity – and they could sometimes work more effectively with HR, work councils and leadership in this direction. In other cases, gender representatives could use more sensitization/awareness training on how caring masculinity is linked to (and useful for) gender equality. In any case, they should be key figures in networking for caring masculinity at the workplace, together with men carers and sensitized leaders and other stakeholders.

> **Role of leadership**:

   - The overwhelming number of interviewees stresses the point that leaders (superiors and higher management) are critical for successful balance of work-life and care. They are important for a care-positive working culture, for the implementation of care-relevant, flexible working conditions, and where these are not (fully) available, leaders can sometimes fill the gap by informal permissions of flexibility. Leaders and managers should be aware of their position. A transformation (and be it a slow one) towards a caring organization should be a top-down management priority.

   - When employees are planning a take out on parental leave, we advise superiors to openly approach their employee in a designated meeting, to discuss his leave, how long it will be, how/if he would like his employer to reach out or contact him during his leave (e.g for outings with the team, social gatherings), and to make a plan for his workload when he is on leave. And consider the workload plan for his team.

   - Understanding possible resistance in management is critical. Managers and superiors have power but are not almighty. They rarely have an easy position which always allows them to be care-positive. So, a conversation about division/department targets that can meet the care needs of employees is a top-down issue and should also be subject to HR strategies and training.

   - Role models are needed to show that care and career are both possible, and organizations walk their talks. Thus, leaders can encourage employees to follow their path. Organizations should enable leaders to care privately. This is critical not only for men carers. It is also an important discussion on how to include women in leadership better. Following the question of gender equality in management positions: How can the existing good conditions for carers be extended to managers, so that stalled or even ended careers of carers is not the only option?

6. Further studies and concepts

Some deeper insights and measures for particular organizations and business lines seem to be needed:

> **More cross-organisational initiatives** on WLB/compatibility/care at universities are needed (like conferences or joint initiatives).

> More research is needed on **how to work on a time structure that keeps things flexible but avoids overwork and blurred boundaries**?

> More research is needed on **how to overcome traditional gendered patterns** …

   ▪ in public service

   ▪ in global enterprises

   ▪ in masculinized businesses/production companies

> **Research on male dominated sectors** with a high probability of buying out male employees from parental leave, like the Military, offshore companies, the seafaring industry etc., and how to find solutions for facilitating parental leave for fathers.

> Monitor actual takeout rate on paternity leave across both private and public sector, as well as paid leave for men.

> Research on well-being, attachment and WLB in families were one of the parents has shift work or has a substantial load of work-related travels away from the family.

> Research on the significance of WLB for employees in relation to increasing female representation in male dominated sectors.

> Research on men's overwork and hidden extra work in the evenings and at nights. What is driving men's overwork at the expense of their own health and family life, and what are the motives for keeping it hidden or elevating it as "heroic"? What are the organisational preconditions?

> Explore other dimensions of care than childcare and self-care, discussing engagement of men in caring for their extended family, partner, friends, local community;

> Explore experiences of women whose partners shared parental leaves;

> Investigate men who did not decide to take a parental leave to explore further the barriers for men's engagement in care.

9   Literature/References

Acker, J. (1991). Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations. In: Lorber J./ Farrell, S.A. (1991): The Social Construction of Gender. London: Sage (162-179).

Acker, J. (1992). Gendering Organizational Theory. In: Mills A.J./ Tancred P. (1992). Gendering Organizational Analysis. London: Sage (248-260).

Acker, J. (2006). Class Questions Feminist Answers. The Gender Lens Series. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield.

Bellmann, L. & Hübler, O. (2015): Are Working Time Accounts Beneficial for German Establishments? IZA Discussion Papers, No. 9583, Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA), Bonn

England, P. (2010) The gender revolution: Uneven and stalled. Gender & Society 24(2): 149–166.

Fernandez-Lozano, I., González, M. J., Jurado-Guerrero, T., & Martínez-Pastor, J. I. (2020). The hidden cost of flexibility: A factorial survey experiment on job promotion. European Sociological Review, 36(2), 265-283.

Fthenakis, W. & Minsel, B. (2002). Die Rolle des Vaters in der Familie [The role of the father in the family]. Stuttgart, Germany: Kohlhammer.

Fraser, N. (1996). Gender equity and the welfare state: a postindustrial thought experiment. In S. Benhabib (Ed.), Democracy and difference. Contesting the Boundaries of the Political (pp. 218- 242). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Gärtner, M., Gieseke, J. & Beier, S. (2006). FOCUS – Fostering caring masculinities. German national report. Oslo, Norway: The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud.

Gärtner, M. (2012). Männer und Familienvereinbarkeit. Betriebliche Personalpolitik, Akteurskonstellationen und Organisationskulturen [Men and family reconciliation]. Opladen: Budrich UniPress

George,A. L. & Bennett, A. (2005). Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Science. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Holter, Ø. G. (2003). Can men do it? Men and gender equality - the Nordic experience (TemaNord, 2003, 510). Copenhagen, Denmark: Øystein Gullvåg Holter and Nordic Council of Ministers.

Holter, Ø. G., Riesenfeld, V., & Scambor, E. (2005). "We don't have anything like that here!" – Organisations, men and gender equality. In R. Puchert, M. Gärtner & S. Höyng (Eds.),

Work Changes Gender. Men and equality in the transition of labour forms (pp. 73-104). Opladen, Germany: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Langvasbråten, T. & Teigen, M. (2006). FOCUS – Fostering caring masculinities (European dimension report). Oslo, Norway: The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud.

Puchert, R., Gärtner, M. & Höyng, S. (Eds.). (2005). Work changes gender. Men and equality in the transition of labour forms. Opladen, Germany: Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Scambor, E., Wojnicka, K. Bergmann, N. (Hg.) (2013). The Role of Men in Gender Equality – European strategies & insights [with S. Belghiti-Mahut, N. Bergmann, M. Gärtner, J. Hearn, Ø. G. Holter, M. Hržen-jak, R. Puchert, C. Scambor, E. Scambor, H. Schuck, V. Seidler, A. White & K. Wojnicka]. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/f6f90d59-ac4f-442f-be9b-32c3bd36eaf1/language-en

Schein, E. (1988). Organizational culture. MIT Working Paper.

Stone, Pamela (2007). Opting Out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home, Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press.

Sullivan, O., Gershuny, J. & Robinson, J.P. (2018) Stalled or uneven gender revolution? A long-term processual framework for understand why change is slow. Journal of Family Theory and Review, 10: 263-279.

Yin, R. K. (2014). Case study research: design and methods (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.