



Reconciliation of Professional and Private Life: Opportunities and Pitfalls of Working from Home

Analysis of the existing situation in Slovenia and Norway

Prepared by **Gender Equality Research Institute**

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- *environment, energy, climate change and low-carbon economy;*
- *culture, civil society, good governance and fundamental rights and freedoms;*
- *Justice and Home Affairs.*

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1. Introduction

The present analysis of the existing situation (hereinafter the Document) was created as part of the PROMETEJ¹ project. PROMETEJ, which is financially supported by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism², is managed by the American Chamber of Commerce³ (AmCham Slovenia). The project addresses the **improvement of the coordination of professional and private life** during and after the **Covid-19 epidemic**, which **accelerated** the introduction of **work at home** by employers, through the development of **an organizational culture** based on **gender equality**. The starting point of the project is the thesis that the **Covid-19 epidemic deepened the existing inequalities between women and men in the labor market**, with a particularly negative impact on women. This was pointed out by a survey by Deloitte (2022)⁴, where almost half of the respondents believed that they must always be **available to the employer**, while a quarter of them fear that sooner or later they will be faced with **a choice between professional and private obligations**. Also, most women with children reported having **greater responsibilities related to childcare** (58%) and **homeschooling** (53%). On the other hand, women who do not have these obligations feel more obliged to **be constantly available to the employer** (53%), compared to those who have the aforementioned obligations (44%). The latter is a source of completely **different stressors** that reinforce the feeling of being **overwhelmed at work**. When developing measures and organizational cultures to improve the coordination of professional and private life, it is therefore crucial to **take into account the principle of gender equality**, because only by consistently pursuing the latter can one go beyond gender stereotypes and intervene directly in the

¹ The full name of the project is »Transfer and implementation of good practices for improving work-life balance, through training and education of employees and managers, with the aim of establishing an organizational structure and culture of companies, based on gender equality«.

² The Program Education, Scholarships, Apprenticeship and Youth Entrepreneurship. More about the Program is available here: <https://www.norwaygrants.si/programi/izobrazevanje-krepitev-cloveskih-virov/>

³ Consortium consists of: (i) Gender Equality Research Institute, (ii) Lidl Slovenija d.o.o., (iii) Riko, industrijski, gradbeni inženiring in leasing, d.o.o., (iv) Faculty of Arts of the University of Maribor - Department of Sociology, (v) Knauf Insulation d.o.o., (vi) Public Scholarship, Development, Disability and Maintenance Fund of the Republic of Slovenia, (vii) A1 Slovenija d. .d, (viii) The Norwegian Automobile Foundation, (ix) AMZS d. d.

⁴ Deloitte (2022). Women @ Work 2022: A Global Outlook. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/si/sl/pages/press/articles/women-at-work.html>.

cultural and social causes for maintaining **the unequal position of women and men** in terms of **caring responsibilities**.

The main goal of the project is to **empower working women and men** in individual organizations included in the consortium with proven **measures to facilitate the reconciliation of professional and private life** when performing **work at home and work on location**, adapted for different levels of jobs. In this way, the indirect goal of the project is also the implementation of an **individualistic**, tailor-made **educational approach** based on **positive psychology**, which contributes to building a respectful organizational culture based on **gender equality and diversity**. With this, the project will develop/strengthen (i) a **combined integrated educational approach** (workshops, lectures, consultations), with which employers and employees will be provided with a set of measures and tools to improve the **coordination of professional and private life**; (ii) **understanding** and treating work at home as a **unique challenge** for balancing professional and private life; (iii) **competencies** of employers and employees at the individual level through a **developed educational program for diverse profiles**; (iv) a **multi-level mentoring scheme** that will equip the target group with skills to facilitate the coordination of professional and private life; (v) a **digital tool for knowledge transfer** beyond the consortium partnership.

In this context, the main purpose of the Document is to prepare an **analysis** of the **existing situation** in the field of **balancing professional and private life** with an emphasis on **working from home** in the **post-pandemic era** and from the perspective of the principle of **gender equality**. In doing so, we focus on three case studies, namely: i) **Slovenia**; ii) **Norway**; iii) **European Union (EU)**. In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the document comprises five chapters, which are presented below. In the first chapter, we prepare an **analysis of the state of legal foundations** in the field of **reconciliation of professional and private life** in the European Union, focusing on legislation in the field of reconciliation and private life in selected member states and presenting **examples of good practices** of legal foundations. In the second chapter, we contextualize the **coordination of professional and private life in Slovenia** with an emphasis on the existing situation, Slovenian **legislation** and the **challenge** in the field of coordinating professional and private life during the **Covid-19 epidemic in Slovenia**. In the latter, with the help of analysis and interpretation of secondary sources, we make sense of the role and

challenges of women and men, challenges related to seniority and professional profile. In this way, we achieve an adequate framework for the **preparation of guidelines** for the future of balancing professional and private life. The third chapter maintains the same structure, but deals with the **challenges of work-life balance in Norway**. In the fourth chapter, we outline the **changes in the workplace** and the environment during **Covid-19** and evaluate the **opportunities** and **pitfalls** of working from home for balancing professional and private life. In doing so, we prepare an **overview** of the current situation in the field of working at home in Slovenia and **examples of good practices** of working at home, with which employers strengthen the aspect of balancing professional and private life. In this respect, the fifth chapter maintains the same structure, but **analyzes work from home from a Norwegian perspective**. This is followed by a synthesis of findings and a conclusion.

2. Analysis of the legal foundations for reconciliation of professional and private life in the European Union

The analysis of the state of legal foundations in the field of balancing professional and private life in the EU consists of three subchapters. In the first subchapter, we present the coordination of professional and private life in the EU. Here we focus both on the very context/nature of the challenges of reconciling professional and private life and on the **legislative aspect** (e.g. selected directives and regulations) of the EU. In the second subchapter, we analyze the legislation in the field of balancing professional and private life in **selected EU member states**, focusing on a group of countries as classified by Bovenberg (2005)⁵ in his analysis based on the search for common characteristics of countries in terms of regulating the field of balancing professional and private life. Based on this, we **include the following groups/models of countries in the analysis**: i) Nordic/s; ii) corporatist/s; iii) Mediterranean/s; iv) Central and Eastern European. In the third subchapter, based on the analysis of the legislative framework in selected EU member states, we prepare **examples of good practices of legal bases**.

2.1. Reconciliation of professional and private life in the European Union

One of the most important milestones at the EU level regarding the reconciliation of professional and private life is the **initiative of the European Commission (EC)** from April 2017 regarding strengthening/supporting the reconciliation of professional and private life for working parents and caregivers⁶. In the initiative, the EC emphasized that women continue to be underrepresented in the labor market compared to men. The so-called **gender gap** in the labor market was **11% in 2020**⁷ (latest available data), with **women** on average in 2020 having **more part-time jobs** than men⁸ at the expense of various **caring tasks** (e.g. for children and/or the elderly) (Eurostat,

⁵ Bovenberg, A. L. (2005). *Balancing work and family life during the life course*. Tilburg: Tilburg University.

⁶ European Commission. (2017). An Initiative to Support Work-Life Balance for Working Parents and Carers. COM(2017)/252. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2017:252:FIN>.

⁷ 66.2% of women between the ages of 20 and 60 were employed, compared to 77.2% of men (Eurostat, 2022).

⁸ 31.3% of women compared to 8.3% of men (ibid.).

2022)⁹. At the same time, it is also worth highlighting the assessment of the EC, which in 2017, as part of the above-mentioned initiative, also highlighted the **assessment of economic damage** due to the gender gap on the labor market. This should amount to **370 billion euros annually** (Mascherini, Bisello and Rioboo Leston, 2016)¹⁰. The gender gap in the labor market is not only a challenge during the active (working) lives of individuals, but especially after the age of 65. Indeed, research has shown that the **average pension gap** between men and women in the EU was **29% in 2019**, as a result of which the risk of poverty among retired women was on average 3-4% higher¹¹ than among retired men (Eurostat, 2021)¹².

One of the main reasons for this is the so-called i. the '**double burden**' that women face throughout their lives, and this double burden is most pronounced (but not exclusively) for middle-aged women who live with partners and have various caring responsibilities (e.g. children) (Fernández-Lozano and Jurado-Guerrero, 2021, p. 6)¹³. This double burden occurs despite the fact that there is a **desire between men and women for a more balanced distribution of responsibilities**, and the fact that the **attitude of men towards caring responsibilities** and private life as such has **changed significantly** (Brunow, Begall and Buchler, 2018)¹⁴. In their research, Fernández-Lozano and Jurado-Guerrero (2021, pp. 6-7) showed, on the example of eight countries, that **women do the vast majority of all unpaid work**. For example, in Austria as much as 70% of all unpaid work is done by women, followed by Poland (69%), Slovenia and Spain (67%), Germany (65%) and Norway (58%).

All of this, among other things, led the EC to create the so-called **EU approach** to the coordination of professional and private life, which thus becomes much broader in its

⁹Eurostat. (2022). Share of women in the EU population. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Gender_statistics.

¹⁰ Mascherini, M., Bisello, M. and Rioboo Leston, I. (2016). The gender employment gap: Challenges and solutions. Available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2016/labour-market/the-gender-employment-gap-challenges-and-solutions>.

¹¹ The risk of poverty among retired women has been growing since 2014. If the poverty risk rate among retired women was 13.9% at the time, it was already 17% in 2019 (Eurostat, 2021).

¹² Eurostat. (2021). Closing the gender pension gap? Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210203-1>.

¹³ Fernández-Lozano, T. and Jurado-Guerrero, I.. (2021). In Depth: Men need to be families too: progress towards caring masculinities in MiC countries. Available at: <https://www.men-in-care.eu/progress-towards-caring-masculinities>

¹⁴ Grunow, D., Begall, K. and Buchler, S. (2018). Gender Ideologies in Europe: A Multidimensional Framework. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80(1), 42–60.

goals and efforts than mere coordination¹⁵. Here, the following goals are placed at the heart of the approach (EC, 2017):

- 1) increased **participation of women** in the labor market and reduction of the **gender gap**, including the wage and pension gap;
- 2) strengthening the **possibilities of employees** to coordinate their professional and private lives through the modernization of the existing legal and public policy framework with an emphasis on **the role of men**;
- 3) support to EU member states in the **formulation of family policies** with the aim of addressing **demographic and social challenges**;
- 4) address the **lack of support (care) services** and reduce the percentage of **women** as individuals in the **household who earn less** (secondary earner).

On the basis of the objectives highlighted above, the EC adopted the Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers (hereinafter referred to as the Directive)¹⁶ on June 20, 2019, which became the central (legal) framework for regulating challenges in the field of coordinating professional and private life at the EU level. The directive has 22 articles, among which the following articles are the most important: i) **paternity leave** (Article 4); ii) **parental leave** (Article 5); iii) **caregiving leave** (Article 6); iv) **absence from work** in case of force majeure (Article 7); v) **payment and compensation** (Article 8); vi) **flexible work arrangements**; vii) **discrimination and protection against abandonment** and the burden of proof (Articles 11 and 12). Slovenia has not (yet) implemented the directive, which systematically tries to reduce challenges on the part of women for active integration into the labor market and to strengthen caring responsibilities on the part of men. The last time it was discussed was in April 2022, when the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities announced that the directive would be transposed into national legislation as part of the "**small social reform**", as they called the package of changes to four laws at the time (Prijatelj Videmšek, 2022)¹⁷. It is also worth highlighting the

¹⁵ Here, we aim at the fact that it does not only address employed women and men, but also addresses (still) unemployed women and men, to coordinate various caregiving tasks in such a way as to reduce the gender gap in the labor market.

¹⁶ Official Journal of the European Union. Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers. (2019)/1158. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32019L1158&from=SL>

¹⁷ Prijatelj Videmšek, M. (2022). Očetom več dopusta, ki se ga ne da prenesti. *Delo*. Available at: <https://www.delo.si/novice/slovenija/ocetom-vec-dopusta-ki-se-ga-ne-da-prenesti/>.

matrix of **regular monitoring and evaluation of the Directive**, which was prepared as part of the **Men in Care project**. Thus, in order to be successful, the Directive should improve the current indicators to allow the measurement of the main areas of the implementation of the Directive and the inclusion of men (Men in Care, 2022)¹⁸. Both the areas and the measures that would be used to strengthen the measurement indicators of these areas are presented below (Men in Care, 2022, p. 4):

- 1) **Paternity/maternity/parental leave** – amount of payment, number of days of leave used in the child's first twelve and eighteen months, number of days used by only one parent or at the same time as a parent, use of leave for full or shorter working hours;
- 2) **Care leave, absence from work in case of force majeure** - share of beneficiaries, share of users, number of days of leave used in the year, reason;
- 3) **Flexible work arrangements** – shortened working hours (according to the amount of payment and reason for shortening), flexible working hours and overtime work, spatial flexibility (work from home);
- 4) **Relationship with other policies and effects** – indicators regarding children's involvement in pre-school education and care, annual or biennial surveys on time spent on paid work, unpaid work, income and attitudes to the fairness of the division of labor.

2.2. Legislation about the reconciliation of professional and private life in selected member states of the European Union

As a starting point for the analysis of legislation in the field of balancing professional and private life in selected EU member states, we take Bovenberg (2005), who analyzed various countries to prepare ideal-type groups/models of countries in this area. He divided these into (Bovenberg, 2005, pp. 11–13):

- 1) **Nordic/Scandinavian model;**
- 2) Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Saxon model;
- 3) **corporatist/Bismarckian model;**
- 4) **Mediterranean model;**

¹⁸ Men in Care. (2022). *Priporočila za javne politike*. Available at: https://www.men-in-care.eu/fileadmin/WWP_Network/redakteure/Projects/MiC/SLO_Political_Recommendations_Final.pdf.

5) Central and Eastern European model.

Given that the Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Saxon model is not (any longer) present in the EU (the only example of this country was the United Kingdom), we will consider only four groups/models of countries when analyzing the legislation in the field of balancing professional and private life. Here we focus on the following examples of countries, namely: i) **Sweden** (Nordic/Scandinavian model); ii) **Austria** (corporatist/Bismarckian model); iii) **Spain** (Mediterranean model); iv) **Poland** (Central and Eastern European model). The legislation in the selected countries is analyzed in terms of up to three areas, as envisaged by the Directive (2019), namely: i) **flexible/flexible forms of work**; ii) **care leave, force majeure, absence from the workplace**; iii) **paternity/maternity/parental leave**. In the following, we present the legislation in selected member states in relation to selected areas.

Figure 1: The legislative framework for work-life balance in the three areas on the example of Sweden and Austria.

	Sweden	Austria
flexible/flexible forms of work	40-hour working week with a flexible/sliding schedule (so-called <i>flextid</i>). In practice, this means that an employee can work more one day (e.g. 10 hours) and then work less the next day (or any day of his choice) (e.g. 6 hours).	<i>Elternteilzeit</i> (part-time work for the parent), which allows the parent to take a 20% reduction in regular work due to child care until the child turns seven or four in small companies (fewer than 20 employees) and at the same time the right to return to full-time work.
care leave, force majeure, absence from the workplace	Swedish legislation knows a so-called "VAB policy" (<i>Vård av Barn</i> - Care of Children), which allows employees up to 120 days per year of paid absence from work to care for children.	Austrian legislation allows individuals to take time off from work to care for children or the elderly. It is limited to one week (<i>Krankenpflegefreistellung</i>).

paternity/maternity/parental leave	480 days of paid parental leave per child. Each parent is entitled to 240 days, of which 90 days are reserved (and non-transferable) for each parent. In practice, father or mother can transfer up to 150 days to the other.	Employed mothers have the option of using childcare for between 45 and 90 minutes a day, depending on their working relationship. A parent can take advantage of 426 days of parental leave, for which he receives up to 33.88 euros per day. From 2019, the father can also apply for paternity leave of up to a month, but his employer must approve it (it is not a right).
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Sources: Egerstorm (2021)¹⁹; Fernández-Lozano and Jurado-Guerrero (2021, str. 16).

Figure 2: The legislative framework for work-life balance in the three areas on the example of Spain and Poland.

	Spain	Poland
flexible/flexible forms of work	An individual's unpaid right to have reduced working hours (until the child reaches the age of 12) from 2019. An individual has the right to reduce his working hours by one hour per day until the child is nine months old. In some companies, several weeks' absence from work is also possible.	Polish legislation provides an unpaid individual right for part-time work with the aim of balancing professional life and child care (up to 32 weeks). Mothers who work at least four hours a day are entitled to a break for breastfeeding.
care leave, force majeure, absence from the workplace	An individual's unpaid right to leave the workplace for 2 to 3 years to care for a family member. During this time, he	The right of an individual to two paid days of leave for parents with at least one child up to the age of 14. Employed

¹⁹ Egerstorm, C. (2021). Work-Life Balance: Discover why Sweden is a great place to work. Iknalsemikan. Available at: <https://www.iknalsemikan.com/post/work-life-balance-discover-why-sweden-is-a-great-place-to-work> .

	or she keeps his job. In the case of caring for a child, social contributions are also paid to the individual. Spanish law also provides for 2-4 days of paid absence from work in case of child care/death in the family.	women and men have the right to leave the workplace for care needs (up to 60 days a year until the child is 8 years old and up to 14 days to care for other family members). Such absence is paid in the amount of 80% of the employee's salary.
paternity/maternity/parental leave	From 2021, Spanish law provides for a 100% paid and non-transferable right to parental leave for a child up to one year of age (16 weeks for each parent).	In 2010, Poland introduced 100% paid maternity leave of up to two weeks for men, which is not transferable to either the mother or another family member. The individual is entitled to parental/maternity/paternity leave in the amount of 34 weeks (80% of salary), which is transferable. Also, Polish legislation provides for unpaid leave of a parent to care for a child for up to 36 months, if the individual so decides.

Sources: Fernández-Lozano and Jurado-Guerrero (2021, p. 18–19); Eurofound (2022)²⁰; Wade (2022)²¹.

2.3. Examples of good practices of legal bases in selected member states of the European Union

Legislation or legal bases are – as already pointed out in the previous subsection – an important aspect of the coordination of professional and private life, as they represent an **institutional reference point**, both for employers and employees. Also, at the

²⁰ Eurofound. (2022). Living and working in Poland. Available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/country/poland>.

²¹ Wade, S. (2022). Survey reveals how Spain compares with other countries for work-life balance in Europe. *The Olive Press*. Available at: <https://www.theolivepress.es/spain-news/2022/05/29/survey-reveals-how-spain-compares-with-other-countries-for-work-life-balance-in-europe/>.

macro level, they regulate both social and socio-economic aspects, which employers and employees can benefit from when designing (their own) strategies to **reduce the conflict between professional and private life** (Fernández-Lozano and Jurado-Guerrero, 2021, p. 14). Appropriate legislation in this area, especially in the area of **individual/family rights** (e.g. non-transferable or transferable right to transfer parental/paternal/maternity leave) and the **level and amount of compensation** (e.g. paid or unpaid leave, high or low salary compensation) is becoming a central framework for pursuing/strengthening the reconciliation of professional and private life with an emphasis on reducing discrimination based on gender (different forms of gender gaps, defined in subsection 2.1.).

Based on this, Fernández-Lozano and Jurado-Guerrero (2021, pp. 14-15) derived **two types of legislative frameworks of countries** in the field of reconciliation of professional and private life, namely: i) countries with a legal framework that **promotes gender equality** in the field of balancing professional and private life, ii) countries with a legal framework that **does not promote equality between the sexes** in the field of balancing professional and private life, as they design the measures in such a way that they are tied primarily to the rights of women that are mothers. Therefore, in the following, we highlight **examples of good practices** of legal foundations in **Spain** and **Sweden**, which pursue the principle of gender equality in their legislation in regulating private and professional life. We present them in the following points, namely:

- 1) While in Austria and Poland the right to **absence from the workplace** for the needs of **breastfeeding** (feeding) is tied to the **working mother**, in **Spain** this right is also guaranteed to **fathers** (Merkelson, 2010)²²;
- 2) Spanish legislation is also progressive in terms of **transferability of parental leave**, since, unlike Austrian, Polish and Swedish legislation, it does not allow the transferability of parental leave to one of the parents (usually the mother). Spanish legislation thus provides for **paternity and maternity leave of equal length** (each parent has a non-transferable 16 weeks of leave to care for the child) (Jurado-Guerrero and Muñoz-Comet, 2021)²³;

²² Merkelson, S. (2010). Spanish fathers now get breastfeeding leave. *Foreign Policy*. Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/10/01/spanish-fathers-now-get-breastfeeding-leave/>.

²³ Jurado-Guerrero, T. and Muñoz-Comet, J. (2021). Spain: a pioneer in gender-equal leave. *N-IUSSP*. Available at: <https://www.niussp.org/family-and-households/spain-a-pioneer-in-gender-equal-parental-leave/>.

- 3) Since 1972, Swedish legislation has known the so-called i. **flexitid model**, which enables employees (where possible) to have **sliding/flexible working hours**, with which employees can determine the number of hours worked on a daily basis (e.g. on Monday a person can work 10 hours in order to be able to benefit on Wednesday 2 hours for other (caring) obligations; however, the 40-hour weekly obligation must remain);
- 4) Swedish law provides **for 480 days of parental leave**, whereby the **father must take 90 days of paternity leave** (just like the mother). So both father and mother can **transfer up to 150 days to each other** (Gnewski, 2019)²⁴.

3. Reconciliation of professional and private life in Slovenia

The overview of the situation in the field of balancing professional and private life in Slovenia consists of four subchapters. In the first subchapter, we outline the **Slovenian legislation** in the field of balancing professional and private life with the analysis and interpretation of primary sources. In the second subchapter, we **analyze the situation in the field of work-life balance in Slovenia** through the analysis of (available) qualitative and quantitative data. In the third subchapter, we describe the **challenges** in the field of balancing professional and private life **during the Covid-19 epidemic**, focusing on the role and **challenges of women and men in Slovenia, challenges related to parenthood, and challenges related to the professional profile**. In the last subchapter, based on the previous three subchapters, we prepare **guidelines** for the future of balancing professional and private life in Slovenia.

3.1. Slovenian legislation about reconciliation of professional and private life

In 2021, the Peace Institute (*Mirovni Inštitut*) and the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the Republic of Slovenia (*MDDSZ*) prepared a **report on policies in the field of balancing professional and private life and the role of men as fathers** (hereinafter the Report)²⁵. The report is important as it is a

²⁴ Gnewski, M. (2019). Sweden's parental leave may be generous, but it's tying women to the home. *Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jul/10/sweden-parental-leave-corporate-pressure-men-work>.

²⁵ Mirovni inštitut in MDDSZ. (2021). Poročilo o politikah na področju usklajevanja poklicnega in zasebnega življenja ter vloga moškega kot očeta. Available at: <https://www.docdroid.net/8ngUTdo/ad-porocilo-o-politikahslo-pdf#page=15>

review of (legal) rights that help to facilitate the coordination of professional and private life. Based on the Employment Relations Act²⁶ and the Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act²⁷, the **most important rights** that contribute to the above-mentioned coordination are the following (Report, 2021, p. 15): i) **maternal, parental and paternity leave**; ii) **the right to work part-time** in accordance with the regulations on parental care; iii) **the right to a break for breastfeeding** during working hours; iv) **the employee's right to propose a different distribution of working time** due to the need to balance professional and private life; v) **the right of an employee who cares for and protects a child** who needs special care and protection to **at least three additional days of annual leave**; vi) **the right to one additional day of annual leave** for each **child under the age of 15**; vii) the right to use annual leave, also taking into account family obligations; viii) **the right of parents of school-aged children** to use at least **one week of annual leave during the school holidays**; iv) **protection against night and overtime work**.

The Report (2021, p. 15) points out that Slovenian legislation provides fairly good opportunities for the coordination of professional and private life, but practice shows that **problems arise in the realization of certain rights related to coordination and parenthood**. Skorupan (2017, pp. 42-53)²⁸ analyzed the legislation, which represents an obstacle on the way to easier reconciliation of professional and private life, in detail. In doing so, she focused on the **laws and by-laws**, which, with their individual provisions, **represent an obstacle to the above-mentioned coordination**. These are (Skorupan, 2017, p. 42):

- 1) Employment Relations Act;
- 2) Healthcare and Health Insurance Act;
- 3) Rules on compulsory health insurance;

²⁶ Legal Information System of the Republic of Slovenia. (2022). Employment Relations Act. Adapted on 5. March 2013, in force from 12. April 2013. Available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5944>.

²⁷ Legal Information System of the Republic of Slovenia. (2022). Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act. Adapted on 3. April 2015, in force from 29. April 2014. Available at: <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO6688>.

²⁸ Skorupan, M. (2017). Analiza slovenske zakonodaje na temo usklajevanja zasebnega in poklicnega življenja s predlogi zakonodajnih sprememb. In Usklajevanje zasebnega in poklicnega življenja v praksi. Ekvilib inštitut. Available at: <http://www.certifikatdpp.si/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/EKVILIB-Institut-lzkusnje-z-izvajanjem-projekta-certifikat-druzini-prijazno-podjetje-v-SLO-A4-2015-Low.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3l6alwNHjm1IiYOEjNVQrjtr79qFCAAY3lfYC9MCEtyGDNk9ZI4etk5UM>

- 4) Pension and Disability Insurance Act;
- 5) Income Tax Act;
- 6) Corporate Income Tax Act;
- 7) Value Added Tax Act;
- 8) Decree on the tax treatment of reimbursement of costs and other income from employment;
- 9) Kindergartens Act.

In the following, we summarize some of the most important challenges - related to the specific law/by-law - for the coordination of professional and private life.

Figure 3: Challenges of certain laws and/or by-laws from the point of view of balancing professional and private life

Law/by-law	Challenge
Employment Relations Act	<p>Too little flexibility/flexibility of working hours; Employment Relations Act should allow employers (and consequently employees) to arrange working hours, night work, breaks, daily and weekly rest differently in the employment contract for certain jobs or employee profiles, which are defined by the company themselves through their act (as applies, for example, to managers, procurators and senior employees according to Article 157);</p> <p>The problem of regulating work at home (the challenge of the amount of compensation for the use of own funds, the issue of providing the necessary funds and materials for the smooth performance of work obligations, the problem of the value threshold for taxation of compensation for the use of own funds and the payment of contributions from compensation for the use of own funds up to the point when this is included in the tax base).</p>
Income Tax Act	Group gatherings of employees with their (possible) partners and children (tax treatment

	<p>considers such gatherings as credit, so the value of credits on a monthly level may not exceed EUR 13);</p> <p>Gifts to employees' children and partial payment of childcare costs (bonuses are included in the employee's tax base, so the employer may not give a gift to the employee upon the birth of a child, nor may he help pay for childcare);</p> <p>Co-financing of benefits for employees' free time (unfavorable tax treatment discourages employers from allowing employees to co-finance various events, relaxation, counseling).</p>
Kindergartens Act	<p>Establishment of a kindergarten for employees' children (employers have a desire to develop certain forms of public-private partnership with the goal of establishing kindergartens for employees, but are stuck with city ordinances, where permanent/temporary residence continues to be the priority criterion for inclusion in kindergarten; many employees in the local this kindergarten would not have/does not have permanent/temporary residence).</p>
Healthcare and Health Insurance Act	<p>The problem of absence from work due to hospital treatment of children (a parent/employee - except in the case of a severe form of illness - does not have the right to absence from work, neither with compensation nor without salary compensation, for longer than six months);</p> <p>The right to absence from work with salary compensation for caring for a child (only one parent has the right to salary compensation for the care of a close family member - in the event that the mother benefits from this and she falls ill at the same time as the child, the father is not entitled to absence from work with compensation child care wages);</p>

	The right to absence from work with salary compensation for caring for a child from the age of 18 onwards (an employee has the right to absence from work with compensation for caring for a close family member up to the age of seven; in certain cases it is extended only until the age of 18, but no longer, although the child might need care even after turning 18).
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Source: Skorupan, 2017 (p. 42–53)

3.2. The situation in the field of reconciliation of professional and private life in Slovenia

The Resolution on the Family Policy (2018-2028) (hereinafter the Resolution)²⁹ serves as a starting point for understanding the state of affairs in the field of reconciliation of professional and private life in Slovenia. The Resolution through various researches, places **Slovenia** in the group of **Nordic/Scandinavian countries** in terms of the characteristics of **family policy**, as public policies in this area enable good support in balancing professional and private life, **financially accessible and high-quality public services**, and equal opportunities for employment of women, with family relief and greater autonomy for its members enabled (Report, 2021, p. 6). The report (2021, p. 7) points out that Slovenia is even better than Sweden in some measures, but continues to have certain **challenges in raising awareness** among the general public **regarding legal measures**, and the problem of **transitioning from transfers to support services** for children and families also remains. Based on this - and based on the legislative framework and the Directive - below, we present the current situation in the field of balancing professional and private life in Slovenia. We present these with the help of the following legal rights: i) **maternity, paternity and parental leave and allowances**; ii) **shorter working hours**; iii) **breastfeeding break and compensation during the breastfeeding break**; iv) **child protection system**.

First, when talking about maternity, paternity and parental leave, it should be emphasized that the **use of parental leave by men** (throughout history) is consistently

²⁹ MDDSZ. (2017) The Resolution of Family Policy 2018–2028: A Society Friendly to All Families. Available at: <https://e-uprava.gov.si/download/edemokracija/datotekaVsebina/306068?disposition=inline>.

low. This has been steadily increasing since 1990, but between 2012 and 2016 it was between **6 and 7%** (Stropnik, 2020)³⁰. After **2017**, when the **30-day paid paternity leave was introduced**, the percentage of men taking parental leave **fell again**. Humer et al. (2021)³¹ thus showed that only **4% of fathers use parental leave**, and the **main reason is the extension of paid paternity leave from 15 to 30 days**, which can be used until the child completes the first grade of primary school. This use is fairly constant in Slovenia, it is emphasized in the Report (2021, p. 10), as approximately **80% of fathers use the first 15 days of paternity leave** (up to the child's sixth month of age)³². At the same time, data from 2016 should also be highlighted, which even then **showed that fathers would be more willing to use paternity leave if employers were more attentive to this** (ibid.). At that time, a greater degree of readiness was perceived among young people, as as many as **35% of all young people included in the survey** (up to 30 years of age) were in favor of the idea that **parents should divide parental leave equally** (Report, 2021, p. 11).

Secondly, the Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act stipulates that one of the parents who cares for and protects a child up to the age of three has **the right to work part-time rather than full-time** (ibid.). From January 1, 2021, Slovenia guarantees the payment of social security contributions from a proportional part of the average of the last 12 salaries up to the full work obligation, which is supposed to **encourage men to exercise the right to shorter working hours due to parenthood**. In 2014, 13.7% of women were employed part-time, of which 13.6% were caring for a child or a disabled adult (Report, 2021, p. 12). **In 2020** (latest available data), **595 fathers and 19,743 mothers were employed part-time**, so 19.7 million euros were needed to pay contributions (ibid.). Thirdly, when it comes to the **breastfeeding break and compensation during the breastfeeding break**, which is made possible on the basis of a pediatrician's certificate from nine to 18 months of age of the child, it should be pointed out that this belongs to the mother, a full-time employee in the **amount of one hour a day**. The **compensation amounts to a proportional part of the average of**

³⁰ Stropnik, N. (2020). Slovenia country note. In A. Koslowski, S. Blum, I. Dobrotić, G. Kaufamn, in P. Moss (ur.), *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2020*. Available at: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/.

³¹ Humer, Ž., Hrženjak, M. and Freljih, M. (2021). *Men in Care: Workplace Support for Caring Masculinities. Country Report. Slovenia*. Ljubljana: Mirovni inštitut.

³² Research has shown that the following three factors are important when introducing paternity/parental leave and when fathers use it: i) individual right; ii) non-transferable right; iii) 100% compensation (Report, 2021, p. 11).

the last 12 salaries. The measure proved to be irrelevant in Slovenia - as the analysis shows (Report, 2021, p. 13) - **as less than 10 women use it annually.**

Slovenia has a well-developed system of pre-school education and care, which forms the last analyzed aspect. It is a **child care system** where the state encourages and **enables the care of a child** in the first year after its birth to take place in a family environment (ibid.). When the child turns 11 months old, the **state provides daycare** for him in a kindergarten, which is **co-financed by the state and the municipality**, depending on the income class of the parents. Based on statistical data, **54.3% of one-year-old children**, 80.1% of two-year-old children, 89.5% of three-year-old children, 93% of four-year-old children were enrolled in kindergarten in 2020, and **95% of five-year-old children** (ibid.). It is also worth pointing out that there were, in **2020, 88% of public and 12% of private kindergartens in Slovenia** (ibid.). Finally, it is worth highlighting the role and involvement of the father in parenting in Slovenia. Research has shown that in Slovenia the differences in time spent between the sexes are still large, as **women** spend an average of **200 more hours per year on household chores than men**, and more than **500 hours more on care and childcare** (Report, 2021, p. 18). Care for sick family members is also disproportionately distributed in Slovenia, as **81% of absences to care for a sick family member are used by women** (19% by men). Judging by the latest available data regarding the time that working women and men in Slovenia spend on household chores and childcare, working women spend **16 hours a week on household chores** (men 8), and **29 hours on care and childcare** (men 18) (Eurofound, 2016)³³.

3.3. Challenges of reconciliation of professional and private life during the Covid-19 epidemic in Slovenia

From 2020 onwards, as the world faced the Covid-19 epidemic, both employers and employees were forced into hybrid and remote work. As the European Commission wrote in one of the first reports (2022)³⁴, **working from home** has become the **new normal** for many. At the same time, they emphasized that in most cases the

³³ Eurofound. (2016). *European Quality of Life Survey 2016*. Available at: <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys/european-quality-of-life-survey-2016>.

³⁴ European Commission. (2022). How to promote a good work-life balance for employees post-COVID.19. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/how-promote-good-work-life-balance-employees-post-covid-19-2022-05-05_sl.

advantages outweighed the disadvantages, as there were **no transportation costs** to work, this type of work encouraged **independence and focus**, and employee **productivity was also higher** (ibid.). The hours that would otherwise be spent on the road or paid public transport now **increased the free time of employees** without jeopardizing productivity. But during the Covid-19 epidemic, a **high-quality coordination of professional and private life was a big challenge** for employees. This was shown by the results of a survey by Sodja (2020, p. 4)³⁵, where employees reported that they were **more exposed to stress** than usual due to **concern for their own health**³⁶. Even if **working from home in normal conditions** could help to facilitate the coordination of professional and family obligations, **workers in these conditions were burdened** with challenges such as the **absence of network connections** or the **implementation of (work) tasks in an extremely short time** (ibid.) . At the same time, it is also worth highlighting the results of the **all-Slovenian Covid-19 survey**³⁷, which showed that **40%** of parents rated distance education as stressful. They spent an average of **140 minutes a day helping** their youngest elementary school student **with schoolwork**, and 74% of them estimated that they spend more time helping with schoolwork than before the start of the epidemic (ibid.).

At the same time, it should also be pointed out that the **share of all workers in Slovenia who worked during the epidemic in their free time** in order to fulfill their work **obligations was higher than the EU average**. The results of the Eurofound survey showed that **21.4%** of such employees were employed in Slovenia in April 2022 (17.5% EU average)³⁸. Such a share was **even higher among those who worked from home**³⁹, and the results of the analysis showed that employees already emphasized that this type of work will become a new reality, and that it will be necessary - if we want to make working from home sustainable – to address challenges related to **overtime work** (ibid.). One of the reported challenges in working

³⁵ Sodja, U. (2020). Vplivi Covid-19 na nekatere vidike kakovosti življenja in družbene blaginje. Urad za makroekonomske raziskave: Ljubljana. Available at: <https://www.umar.si/fileadmin>.

³⁶ It should also be noted that according to data in Slovenia, 36.8% of respondents temporarily lost their jobs due to Covid-19 (the average in the EU was 23.2%), while 5.5% of respondents remained without work. Likewise, 7.4% of Slovenians reported that they could lose their employment in the next three months (UMAR, 2020, p. 4).

³⁷ Aragon. (2020). Nationwide Covid-19 Insight survey. Available at: <https://www.aragon.si/vseslovenska-raziskava-covid-19-insight-vol2/>.

³⁸ Sodja (2020, p. 4) emphasizes that the data combines responses every day and every other day. 12.8% of Slovenians claimed that they work every day in their free time (9.8% was the EU average).

³⁹ Sodja (2020, p. 4) shows that there is no data for Slovenia, but that the share at EU level was 27%.

from home was **focusing on work itself**. Thus, the share of those who had difficulty concentrating on work due to family responsibilities was **higher in Slovenia** than the **EU average** (Slovenia 9.5% compared to EU 8.8%). Employees also reported that they were **worried about work even when they were not working** (about 23.5%) and that because of their work **they could not devote the time** they wanted to their **family** (17.8%). From the point of view of balancing professional and private life - judging by the results of the analysis - working from home during the Covid-19 epidemic caused the **greatest problems for people with small children and women**⁴⁰.

3.4. The role and challenges of men in reconciliation of professional and private life

Given that the role of women⁴¹ both in the labor market and in terms of balancing professional and private life has been well illuminated⁴², in this **subchapter we deal mainly with men**⁴³, both in their **professional and private lives**⁴⁴. Based on surveys and semi-structured interviews⁴⁵ in eight (European) countries, Gärtner, Scambor and Warat (2021)⁴⁶ find that there are (at least) **four structural limitations** in the coordination of professional and private life, namely: i) **the organization/structure of work from the perspective of the employee's profile**; ii) **organizational culture in companies**; iii) **human factors**; iv) **legislation**. In the following figure, we show the

⁴⁰ Sodja (2020, p. 5) notes that in Slovenia, more women than men reported that it is difficult for them to focus on work due to family responsibilities and that they cannot devote the time they should to their work due to family responsibilities.

⁴¹ International Labour Office. (2010). Women in labour markets: Measuring progress and identifying challenges. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_elm/---trends/documents/publication/wcms_123835.pdf.

⁴² Mayya, S. S., Martis, M., Ashok, L., Monteiro, A. D and Mayya, S. (2021). Work-Life Balance and Gender Differences: A Study of College and University Teachers from Karnataka. *SAGE Open*, 11(4).

⁴³ Miner, A., Kavanagh, A., King, T. and Currier, D. (2018). The Influence of Maculine Norms and Occupational Factors on Mental Health: Evidence From the Baseline of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Male Health. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 12(4), 696–705.

⁴⁴ Fleming, P. J., Lee, J. G. L. and Dworkin, S. L. (2014). "Real Men Don't": Constructions of Masculinity and Inadvertent Harm in Public Health Interventions. *American Journal of Public Health*, 104(6), 1029–1035.

⁴⁵ The results are based on the responses of 172 people from 21 organizations (mostly companies) (Gärtner, Scambor and Warat, 2021, p. 7-8).

⁴⁶ Gärtner, M., Scambor, E. and Warat, M. (2021). Transnational Analysis of Studies in Organizations. Available at: https://www.men-in-care.eu/fileadmin/WWP_Network/redakteure/Projects/MiC/MiC_org_transnational_report_april_2022.pdf.

findings of the study from the point of view of the role and challenges of men in balancing professional and private life.

Figure 4: Structural limitations in the coordination of professional and private life with emphasis on men

Type of a structural limitation	Role and challenges of men
<p>the organization/structure of work from the perspective of the employee's profile</p>	<p>many companies, despite the new reality (Covid-19 epidemic), remained committed to the policy of working on company premises (part of the organizational culture);</p> <p>the employer's flexibility is highly dependent on the employee's profile – most respondents reported that working from home was reserved only for office workers and management workers, but not for other employees;</p> <p>the respondents also reported that the companies did not have developed appropriate policies in the field of working from home, and above all it was unclear how this flexibility should be understood from the point of view of working from home (the eight-hour workday can be 'stretched over the whole day');</p> <p>respondents reported that hierarchical and complex (multi-level) company management structures acted as 'stiflers' of new ideas, especially regarding measures to balance professional and private life - in Iceland, for example, they reported that they had more female managers who had extremely good ideas regarding the measures themselves, but middle management did not know how to translate these ideas into practice;</p> <p>many employees also reported that working from home often resulted in a large amount of overtime due to higher productivity levels and a greater number of work tasks for employees - it</p>

	<p>was emphasized that the professional became private and vice versa when working from home;</p> <p>flexibility also brought with it more and more anxiety and stress, mainly men reported; at the same time, they also emphasized that working from home was a lever for the fact that employees became "invisible" to their superiors and that, due to this invisibility, the latter lost direct contact with the actual amount of work that someone can do in eight hours ;</p> <p>researchers called such a work culture a precarious culture of compatibility, which functions until something worse happens (e.g. illness, burnout, etc.) (Gärtner, 2012)⁴⁷;</p> <p>men reported that due to morning/early meetings on a daily basis, they could not be more involved in caring responsibilities for the child (e.g. driving to kindergarten):</p> <p>men (mainly in Poland, Iceland and Norway) reported that there are certain expectations that they will prioritize their work and demonstrate a high level of productivity on a daily basis.</p>
<p>organizational culture in companies</p>	<p>male employees reported a fear that if they internalized and took action in the areas of professional and private life, they would be punished in such a way that someone else would take over their work/responsibilities;</p> <p>male employees reported that they were willing to sit in meetings after the end of the workday and sign off on e-mails after work, as this is "suitable for ambitious individuals";</p> <p>the interviewees reported that there is no "speak-up culture" in their organizational units, which</p>

⁴⁷ Gärtner, M. (2012). *Männer und Familienvereinbarkeit. Betriebliche Personalpolitik, Akteurskonstellationen und Organisationskulturen* (Men and family reconciliation). Opladen: Budrich UniPress.

	<p>allows them to speak publicly about their private problems and health;</p> <p>some male interviewees emphasized that male employees are not sufficiently aware of their rights as caregivers (men are therefore not the primary targets of awareness campaigns, which is a consequence of deeply rooted gender stereotypes);</p> <p>the results of the interviews showed that until a few years ago, men were not involved in the creation of internal policies/measures of organizations in the field of gender equality, therefore there is still a belief that it is a woman who sacrifices her career for the sake of caring obligations;</p> <p>many individuals also reported so-called "internalized stereotypes", which meant that there are certain "frameworks" about which there is no public and healthy discussion - this is also why most of them reported that the organizational culture of their companies was not favorable to measures in the field of gender equality or to measures in the field of balancing professional and private life.</p>
<p>human factors</p>	<p>the technocratic, inflexible and restrictive style of leadership as an obstacle to the implementation of measures in the field of balancing professional and private life;</p> <p>respondents pointed out that the biggest challenge is the "older generation of managers", managers with a "hegemonic mentality" and those managers who are oriented towards "productivity and efficiency";</p> <p>men reported that managers/leaders did not understand why an employee (male) would take</p>

	<p>on caring roles and why it would be his duty (the term child as a 'male fad' appeared many times);</p> <p>the lack of internal acts regarding the involvement and support of employees, including the idea of social justice, as a result of which managers do not want to act "on their own" in "undefined" areas.</p>
legislation	<p>the relative vagueness of legislation in some countries discourages men from taking paternity/parental leave (eg 80% compensation for lost wages).</p>

Source: Gärtner, Scambor and Warat (2021, p. 14–19).

3.5. Guidelines for the future of reconciliation of professional and private life in Slovenia

As Kanjuo Mrčela and Černigoj Sadar (2007)⁴⁸ point out, in order to **successfully coordinate professional and private life**, it is necessary to achieve an appropriate combination of **three levels**, namely: i) **social** (legislation); ii) **organizational** (practices and policies of employers/organizations); iii) **individual** (strategies of individuals). In practice, this means that the **very success** of reconciling professional and private life depends on the **agreement between the parents** in the family regarding the **fair distribution of care and household tasks**, at the level of **society** there **must be an appropriate infrastructure** (e.g. kindergartens) that supports this, and the **state and employers** must **enable** (state), **support** and **implement** (organization) measures to facilitate coordination of these obligations (Report, 2021, p. 3). This means that the guidelines for the future of work-life balance must be designed in such a way as to **consolidate the levels highlighted above and enable their interweaving**. Based on the analysis carried out in the previous (sub)chapters, we prepare the guidelines for the future in such a way as to synthesize all the findings and display them in the table below.

⁴⁸ Kanjuo Mrčela, A. and Černigoj Sadar, N. (2007). *Delo in družina: s partnerstvom do družini prijaznega delovnega okolja*. Ljubljana: Faculty of Social Sciences.

Figure 5: Guidelines for the future of reconciliation of professional an private life on three levels

Social level	Organizational level	Individual level
<p>Implementation of the Directive⁴⁹ and the simultaneous creation of a matrix to measure the success of the implementation itself, with an emphasis on the success of the inclusion of men⁵⁰ (paternity/maternity/parental leave; care leave, absence from work; relationship with other policies and effects - see p. 5-6);</p> <p>Update Employment Relations Act in such a way as to create an appropriate legal basis for flexibility of working hours and work from home (including the issue of compensation for the use of home equipment, electricity, etc.);</p> <p>Arrange the tax aspects (level of credits) for group gatherings of employees, gifts to employees' children and possible participation of the organization/companies in the</p>	<p>In the future, companies/organizations will have to start actively addressing working hours (e.g. flexible working hours), work organization (e.g. working from home, shift work from the point of view of balancing professional and private life), information and communication (with an emphasis on raising men's awareness of their custodial rights), leadership skills (strengthening an organizational culture that is receptive to measures in the field of gender equality and balancing professional and private life), personnel development (sensitization and awareness of personnel regarding professional and private life, strengthening the "culture of speaking up" regarding all aspects, pay and</p>	<p>A prerequisite for success at the individual level is the social and organizational level; however, it depends on each individual whether he or she will take advantage of the opportunities offered by the organizational and social level. In this regard, raising awareness about gender stereotypes⁵², toxic male patterns⁵³ and the importance of a fair division of daily responsibilities between the heads of the household (e.g. household and caring tasks) is crucial.⁵⁴</p>

⁴⁹ Refers to the Directive on work-life balance for parents and carers (2019).

⁵⁰ Men in Care (2022).

⁵² Chung, H. and van der Lippe, T. (2020): Flexible Working, Work-Life Balance, and Gender Equality: Introduction. *Social Indicators Research*, 151, 365–381.

⁵³ Ilić, M. (2022). Toksična moškost stane Nemčijo 63 milijard evrov na leto. *Svet Kapitala*. Available at: <https://svetkapitala.delo.si/aktualno/toksicna-moskost-stane-nemcijo-63-milijard-evrov-na-leto/> .

⁵⁴ Poelmans, S. Odle-Dusseau, H. and Beham, B. (2008): Work-Life Balance: Individual and Organizational Strategies. In S. Cartwright in C. L. Cooper (ur.), *The Oxford Handbook of Organizational Well Being*, str. 180–213. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

financing of child care and co-financing of benefits for employees' free time.	reward structure and services for families ⁵¹ .	
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Source: Summarized from previous (sub)chapters.

4. Reconciliation of professional and private life in Norway

The review of the situation in the field of reconciliation of professional and private life in Norway consists of four subchapters. The first subchapter is devoted to an **overview of the Norwegian legislative framework** for work-life balance. In the second subchapter, based on existing data, the **current situation** in the field of work-life balance in Norway is outlined. The third subchapter is dedicated to an overview of the **challenges during the Covid-19** epidemic in Norway in the field of balancing professional and private life, which includes data on **challenges according to personal circumstances such as gender, parentage and the professional profile** of individuals. The fourth and final subchapter consists of **guidelines** that can help employers and employees in the future reconciliation of work and private life in Norway.

4.1. Norwegian legislation about reconciliation of professional and private life

In 2017, the commercial law firm Storeng, Beck&Due Lung, in cooperation with L&E Global, prepared a report on Norwegian policies for regulating labor relations (hereinafter the Report on Norwegian policies)⁵⁵. The report on Norwegian policies is important for the analysis of the situation, as it contains an **overview of Norwegian laws** governing the rights and obligations of both workers and employers, which also includes an **overview of work-life balance policies**. The central law that regulates practically all aspects of employment relations is the **Working Environment Act**⁵⁶ of

⁵¹ Marques, V. C. and Berry, G. R. (2021). Enhancing work-life balance using a resilience framework. *Business and Society Review*, 126(3), 263–281.

⁵⁵ Storeng, Beck&Due Lung. (2017). Employment Law Overview, Norway 2021-2022. Available at: https://knowledge.leglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/LEG_MEMO_Norway_23.12.20_compressed.pdf

⁵⁶ The Working Environment Act regulates the following areas: employment, whistleblowing, requirements for working environments, working hours, right to leave, protection against discrimination, termination of employment, rights of employees in case of transfer by the company and rules regarding disputes (Report on Norwegian Policies, p. 3).

2005, which must be implemented by all employers. A large part of the Norwegian working environment is subject to **separate collective agreements**, therefore the Working Environment Act also defines possible loopholes within which such agreements can be concluded, which do not necessarily fully reflect the legal provisions, but respect the basic rights of workers and employers. Other laws and regulations that play a role in opportunities and challenges for work-life balance are (Report on Norwegian policies, p. 3):

- 1) National Insurance Act (1997),
- 2) Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act (2017),
- 3) Income Tax Act (1999),
- 4) Holidays Act (1990),
- 5) Value Added Tax Act (2009),
- 6) Kindergarten Act (2005).

The Report on Norwegian policies highlights the **most important rights** within the aforementioned legal regulations that contribute to the reconciliation of professional and private life in Norway (p. 27): i) the **right to work part-time** with the possibility of returning to full-time work ii) **maternity, parental and paternity leave**, iii) the right to use annual leave, iv) the right to holiday pay, v) the right to use **ten personal days a year**, vi) **the right to a monetary compensation** for parents who have **a child aged between 1-2 years, who does not attend kindergarten**, vii) the right to at least **10 days of paid absence**, in the case of a sick child, viii) protection against night and overtime work, ix) **the right to a breastfeeding break during working hours** (ibid.).

4.2. The situation in the field of reconciliation of professional and private life in Norway

To a large extent, the review of the existing situation in the field of reconciliation of professional and private life in Norway was made possible by the country report for Norway on support for the active involvement of men in caring for the home and family, which was created within the framework of Men in Care project (hereinafter the Country Report)⁵⁷. According to the characteristics of family and labor policies, Norway

⁵⁷ Men in Care. (2021). Men in Care: Workplace Support for Caring Masculinities. Country Report. Norway. Available at: https://www.men-in-care.eu/fileadmin/WWP_Network/redakteure/Projects/MiC/Benchmarking_reports/MiC_report_NO.pdf

is placed in the group of **Nordic/Scandinavian countries**, as the state supports, coordinates and implements **public and financially accessible services** for all citizens, which enables **individual consideration of personal circumstances** and, consequently, more effective coordination of professional and private life. The Country report (p. 5) points out that social policies aimed at facilitating the reconciliation of professional and private life are largely adapted to the **two family models** that are currently the most common in Norway: i) **both parents** hold the **same level of employment** and to the **same extent** are **taking care of the children**, ii) **one of the parents** is **employed full-time** and **partially takes care** of the **children**, while the other is **employed part-time** and **takes care** of the **children almost entirely**. The review of the current situation regarding the coordination of professional and private life showed that the **most frequently used rights by workers** who have children are: i) **shorter working hours**, ii) **maternal, paternal and parental leave** and iii) **child care** (ibid.).

i) The Working Environment Act grants the right to reduced working hours to a parent whose child is under 10 years old. Despite the high employment rate of both men and women with children under the age of 12 in Norway (90% of men and 81% of women employed in 2017), a large percentage of **women with children are employed part-time** (41%) compared to a much smaller proportion of men (19%) (Country Report, p. 12). Between 2007 and 2017, however, significant positive progress was made in terms of increasing the working hours of working mothers, which was helped by national efforts such as ensuring accessible childcare and extending non-transferable paternity leave. In addition, in order to facilitate the reconciliation of professional and private life, the Norwegian government adapted a law regarding **breastfeeding breaks** in 2014 that allows all mothers in the **private sector** whose child is under 1 year old to have **one hour of paid breastfeeding** break daily, while women who are employed in the **public sector**, have the right to a **two-hour break** for breastfeeding daily.⁵⁸

ii) In total, in Norway, both parents are granted **49 weeks of parental leave**, of which 26 can be divided between the parents according to their needs, and the mother is entitled to a non-transferable 18 weeks. The **father is entitled to 15 paid weeks** of

⁵⁸ Brandth, B., and Kvande, E. (2018). 'Norway country note', v Blum, S., Koslowski, A., Macht, A. in Moss, P. (ed.), *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2018*, str. 513. Available at: http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports/

paternity leave, which cannot be transferred to the mother - the so-called **father's quota**⁵⁹. Within these 15 weeks, **the father is reimbursed 100% of his salary**, but he can **extend** the paternity leave to **19 weeks**, in which case he is reimbursed **80% of his salary** (Senter for Likestillings-Forskning, 2019)⁶⁰. According to the latest available data from the Country Report (p. 17), progress can be seen in the use of paternity leave, which was fully used by more than **66%** of fathers in **2011**, and by **71%** of fathers in **2014**. Upon the birth of a child, the father is also entitled to 2 weeks of unpaid leave, unless the employer pays for it on his own initiative in order to support the reconciliation of professional and private life (ibid.).

ii) The childcare system in Norway is a comprehensive organism that reflects the efforts of the Scandinavian/Nordic social systems. According to data from **2019**⁶¹, **9 out of 10 children between the ages of 1 and 5 attend kindergarten**, and **47%** of all kindergartens (out of 5,788 in 2019) are **public kindergartens**. The government finances at least **80% of all kindergartens' management costs** - both public and private. In 2018, the authorities spent more than NOK 644 million (about 63.6 million euros) on lowering parental contributions, which helped to increase kindergarten enrollment by 1.2% compared to the previous year. **Parents** are also entitled to a **monetary compensation** if they have a **child between 1-2 years old who does not attend kindergarten**. The supplement is awarded in the amount of 20, 40, 60, 80 or 100%, depending on the extent to which the child attends or does not attend kindergarten.⁶²

4.3. Challenges of reconciliation of professional and private life during the Covid-19 epidemic in Norway

In Norway, even before the Covid-19 epidemic, two trends regarding the choice of type and time frame of employment for women were in the foreground: i) **women** are mostly

⁵⁹ The father's quota was introduced in 1993 with the new parental leave scheme and amounted to 4 weeks. The scheme was first revised in 2005, when the paternity quota was extended to 5 weeks, and last revised in 2018, when it was extended to 15 weeks (Country Report, p. 17).

⁶⁰ Senter for Likestillings-Forskning. (2019). Parental Leave and Father Quota. Available at: <https://www.samfunnsforskning.no/core/english/publications/Infographics/parental-leave-and-father-s-quota/corestatus-parental-leave-fathers-quota.pdf>

⁶¹ Utdannings-direktoratet. (2019). The Norwegian Education Mirror. Available at: <https://www.udir.no/in-english/education-mirror-2019/school/>

⁶² nav. (2022). Cash-for-care benefit. Available at: <https://www.nav.no/en/home/relatert-informasjon/cash-for-care-benefits-for-the-parents-of-toddlers>

employed in the **public sector (70%** of all employees in the public sector are women, while only **37%** of all employees in the **private sector are women**) and ii) **women are employed part-time to** a greater extent than men (41% of women in 2018). On the other hand, positive progress has been made in Norway over the last ten years in terms of sharing care responsibilities between both parents, which has led to a decrease in the percentage of women working part-time during this time period, but the latter still remains high compared to the percentage of men who are employed part-time (Kilden, 2020)⁶³.

Despite the positive developments, the Covid-19 epidemic has presented new challenges for balancing professional and private life for both sexes. In 2020, the Center for Equality (Likestillingssenteret) conducted a **survey** regarding the **challenges faced by working parents during the Covid-19 epidemic** (hereinafter the Survey)⁶⁴, in which 730 people participated, of which 34% were men and 47% were women, of which **46% had at least one child at the time**. The Survey found that most of the **care obligations fell on women**, regardless of whether they were employed full-time, part-time or unemployed. Since the vast majority of women are employed in the public sector (healthcare - **88% of all employees in healthcare are women** -, education and other public services), which was under the greatest pressure during the epidemic, women experienced even more pressure to balance professional and private life. Among the **main responsibilities** that were mostly carried out by **women** in addition to work at home are: i) **helping children with their schoolwork**, ii) **shopping** for basic necessities and iii) **caring for sick children**. According to data from 2020, **women experienced more psychological stress** than men, also due to the fear of being infected with the virus, as this would mean a lack of care for the home and/or children (Kilden, 2020).

In addition to the unequal distribution of care responsibilities between men and women, both sexes agreed (80% of all 1000 included in the Research on working at home and digital solutions)⁶⁵ that **work from home** was the biggest change, to which

⁶³ Kilden. (2020). Likedillings – konsekvenser av koronapandemien. Available at: https://kjonnsforskning.no/sites/default/files/rapporter/notat_bufdir_likestillingskonsekvenser_av_koronapandemien_arbeidsliv_og_ekonomi.pdf

⁶⁴ Likestillingssenteret. (2020). Korona og likestilling. Available at: [https://www.revregn.no/asset/pdf/2021/02/RR-2021-02\(26\).pdf](https://www.revregn.no/asset/pdf/2021/02/RR-2021-02(26).pdf)

⁶⁵ Nergaard, K. (2020). Hjemmekontor og digitale løsninger. Available at: <https://www.fafo.no/images/pub/2020/300420-hjemmekontor-faktaflak.pdf>

it was necessary to adapt. The participants in the research highlighted the following **changes**, which were (in their opinion) most difficult to adapt to, due to **lack of official regulations** and the previously unknown situation of working from home: i) **more work tasks** than before in the office, which had to be carried out in a **very short time**, ii) **increased amount of working hours**, iii) need for **constant availability** as a result of **constant coordination with colleagues** and iv) **problems with productivity**, due to **presence of family members** (ibid.).

4.4. Guidelines for the future of reconciliation of professional and private life in Norway

The Country report (p. 20-22) mainly highlights achievable **measures that employers can use** and, through their implementation, enable better coordination of the professional and private lives of their employees. The measures are basically aimed at **encouraging male workers** to be **active both in the work and home environment**:

- 1) **payment of the 14-day absence** for a male employee upon the birth of a child, which is not legally defined as an emergency payment;
- 2) **encouraging men to take advantage of the extended version of paternity leave** (19 weeks), in a way that during the entire paternity leave **the salary is equal to 100%** of the regular salary;
- 3) **the possibility of paid absence**, if this is established for the purpose of **participating in important family milestones/events** (first day of school, cultural events, etc.);
- 4) **the possibility of a flexible schedule** in order to facilitate the coordination of professional and private life;
- 5) **introduction of basic technological tools** that enable smooth work from home for employees;
- 6) **reduction of working hours in physically demanding professions**, with the aim of **reducing sick leave due to overwork** (ibid.).

5. Changes in the workplace environment during Covid-19 – the meaning of work from home in Slovenia

The present chapter, which deals with changes in the workplace environment during Covid-19 from the point of view of working from home, consists of three subchapters. In the first subchapter, with the help of analysis and interpretation of primary and secondary sources, we prepare an **overview of the current situation in the field of work from home in Slovenia**. Here we focus both on the legislative aspect (legal basis) and on the very incidence of working from home (from the perspective of both quantitative and qualitative data). In the second subchapter, we **contextualize the importance of working from home for work-life balance**, focusing on both the **opportunities** and **pitfalls** of working from home for the success of such balance. In the third subchapter, we identify **examples of good practices** of working from home as a way of ensuring the reconciliation of professional and private life, focusing on the broader aspect of gender equality.⁶⁶

5.1. Overview of existing situation of working from home in Slovenia

According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (SURSTAT), it is difficult to assess the incidence of work from home within regular employment relationships.⁶⁷ There are at least two reasons, according to the PGZ analysis (2021, p. 3)⁶⁸, namely: i) the **lack of existing research** in this area (the most recent is from 2016)⁶⁹; ii) the **changing nature of work from home and remote work** due to ICT is so overwhelming that existing research can hardly keep up with this (new) reality. Nevertheless, there are certain estimates about how many employees in Slovenia actually work from home. There are two ways, namely: i) the **results of international comparative studies** from 2001, 2004 and 2008 by the Center for Human Resources

⁶⁶ For a detailed overview of the field of working from home and good practices of legal bases abroad, see PGZ (2021).

⁶⁷ SURSTAT. 2019. Delovno aktivno prebivalstvo v izbranih poklicnih skupinah po občinah delovnega mesta. Available at: <https://www.stat.si/Statweb/News/Index/8781> .

⁶⁸ PGZ (2021). Poročilo o izvedbi analize slovenske zakonodaje, ki ureja področje dela od doma in dobrih praks pravnih podlag v tujini. Available at: <https://pgz-slo.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Porocilo-o-izvedbi-analize-slovenske-zakonodaje-ki-ureja-podrocje-dela-od-doma-in-dobrih-praks-pravnih-podlag-v-tujini.pdf> .

⁶⁹ Faganel, T. (2016). *Delo na domu v poslovno storitvenih dejavnostih z visoko vsebnostjo znanja* (master thesis). Faculty of Social Sciences, Ljubljana.

Management at the Faculty of Social Sciences (Svetlik et al., 2002⁷⁰; Svetlik et al.⁷¹, 2006; Kohont and Ignjatović, 2013⁷²; ii) **reports of organizations or agencies** (e.g. Eurostat and SURS). Analysis of research on the incidence of working from home and remote work before the Covid-19 epidemic showed that working from home in larger organizations (with 200 or more employees) almost halved, while remote work increased by four times. At the same time, it should be emphasized that **until the Covid-19 epidemic, 5% or less of all employees benefited from flexible work.** SURS⁷³ and Eurostat⁷⁴ provide somewhat different findings from the perspective of the incidence of working from home, which show that the proportion of those who usually work from home has been increasing since 1996. If in **1996** there were **3.7%** of those who usually **worked from home**, in **2019** there were already **6.8%** of such employees. The **biggest leap** can be recorded in **2004**, when **Slovenia became a member of the EU** (6.1%) and in **2014** (7.7%) and **2015** (7.9%), when Slovenia was still in the period of **recovery** due to the **global economic crises**. It is also worth shedding light on the data on working from home from a **gender perspective** - in the period between 1996-2019, **women** worked from home in a much higher percentage than men - most notably after 2009, when more than **8% of women mostly worked from at home**, and between 4.5-6.9% of men worked from home (Eurostat, 2021).

Figure 6: Display of all employed persons between 15-65 years of age who worked from home in the period between 1996 and 2019, expressed as a percentage

⁷⁰ Svetlik, Ivan, Černigoj-Sadar, Nevenka, Gnidovec, Meta, Ignjatović, Miroljub, Mesner- Andolšek, Dana, Stanojević, Miroslav and Trbanc, Martina. (2002). Upravljanje človeških virov, Slovenija 2001: mednarodna primerjalna študija. Ljubljana: Arhiv družboslovnih podatkov. Available at: <http://www.adp.fdv.uni-lj.si/opisi/hrmsi01.xml>

⁷¹ Svetlik, Ivan, Černigoj-Sadar, Nevenka, Kanjuro-Mrčela, Aleksandra, Ignjatović, Miroljub, Kopač, Anja, Mesner-Andolšek, Dana, Nadoh, Jana, Pavlin, Samo, Stanojević, Miroslav and Trbanc, Martina. (2006). Upravljanje človeških virov, Slovenija 2004: mednarodna primerjalna študija. Available at: <http://www.adp.fdv.uni-lj.si/opisi/hrmsi04.xml>

⁷² Kohont, Andrej in Ignjatović, Miroljub. 2013. Od prožnosti do prekarnosti dela: stopnjevanje negativnih sprememb na začetku 21. stoletja. *Teorija in praksa*, 52(3): 350–381.

⁷³ SURS. (2021). Aktivno in neaktivno prebivalstvo. Raziskava o trgu delovne sile.

⁷⁴ Eurostat. 2021. Employed persons working from home as a percentage of the total employment, by sex, age and professional status (%). Available at: <https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>



Source: PGZ (2021, p. 22)

One of the more reliable data - when it comes to monitoring the incidence of working from home - are the official statistics of the Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia. The data shows that in **2019** – even before the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic – **2,062 employers registered their employees to work from home** (FinD-INFO, 2020)⁷⁵. In **2020**, when the Covid-19 epidemic and related measures began, there were already **10,566 such employers**. Since 2020, Slovenia has also recorded the **first discussions at the political level** regarding the regulation of work from home, when at the end of the year the **Economic and Social Council (ESS)**⁷⁶ formed the **first working group** to prepare **changes to Employment Relations Act**, which would lead to the regulation of the field of work from home with an annex to the employment contract (ESS, 2020). In October 2020, the **Strategic Council of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia** already determined **six joint starting points** or recommendations regarding the collective regulation of work from home in all activities that should be the subject of collective negotiations in 2021, namely (Šelih and partners, 2020⁷⁷ in PGZ, 2021, pp. 24–25):

- 1) the possibility of temporary and occasional work at home is defined by **an annex to the employment contract**;

⁷⁵ FinD-INFO. 2020. Razprava o zakonski poenostavitvi dela na domu še letos. Available at: <https://www.findinfo.si/medijsko-sredisce/dnevne-novice/268499>

⁷⁶ Ekonomsko-socialni svet. 2020. 334. Seja ekonomsko-socialnega sveta. Available at: <http://www.ess.si/ess/si.nsf/ekonomsko-socialni-svet/seja%20Ekonomsko-socialnega%20sveta>

⁷⁷ Šelih in partnerji. 2020. Delo na domu v prihodnosti. Available at: <https://selih.si/covid-19/delo-na-domu-v-prihodnosti/>

- 2) work at home is determined as a **possible additional form of employment** for a certain period of time;
- 3) in relation to **healthy and safe working conditions** when working at home, the **employer issues instructions**, and the **employee gives a statement** that his work at home meets the requirements prescribed in the **safety statement with risk assessment**;
- 4) the **amount of compensation for the use of own working resources is defined**;
- 5) the **right to "disconnect" from electronic and technical media** after the end of working hours is established;
- 6) the **protection of privacy and business secrets is defined**.

In the **current (public) debate** in the field of regulating work from home, which officially **opened** in **November 2020**, it is possible to detect a readiness to create an **appropriate legal basis** for regulating work from home and/or remote work (PGZ, 2021, p. 27) . There are mainly two axes of discussion, namely: i) working from home is an **opportunity** for the labor market to become more **attractive and flexible**, thereby enabling better coordination of professional and private life; ii) working at home has certain **pitfalls**, due to which it can become part of a **wider challenge** for the labor market and less favorable for the enforcement of measures in the field of balancing professional and private life. We present both aspects in the next subchapter.

5.2. Opportunities and pitfalls of working from home in Slovenia

Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia (2020)⁷⁸ already announced in 2020 that the **Collective Agreements** for graphic activities and newspaper-informative, publishing and bookselling activities had already **been changed** in the direction of the starting points set by their **strategic council**. Šelih and partners (2020) thus showed that the **changes** were as follows: i) the employer is enabled to control the conditions for ensuring safety and health at work by requiring the employee to provide appropriate visual material of the premises in which he or she works; ii) conditions under which

⁷⁸ GZS. 2020. Webinar GZS: Delo na domu/na daljavo in pravica do odklopa. Available at: https://www.gzs.si/zbornica_racunovodskih_servisov/Novice/ArticleId/77161/webinar-gzs-delo-na-domu-na-daljavo-in-pravica-do-odklopa

work from home can be organized and the method of monitoring the work performed was defined; iii) the minimum amount of compensation for the use of their working resources was determined (at least EUR 0.75/day for the premises or at least EUR 1.75/day for their technical resources). When changes were made to these two Collective Agreements, Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia began to emphasize that **working from home** is a particularly **attractive** form of work for **older employees, employees that live in more remote places, young mothers and colleagues in individual project tasks** (PGZ, 2021, p. 25). This has also been confirmed by some **employment agencies**, which have roughly begun to point out the following **positive aspects** of working from home and/or working remotely: i) **increased motivation** of employees; ii) **easier day-to-day coordination** of employees' **obligations**; iii) there is **no daily commuting** and the associated loss of time; iv) pressure from **younger generations** who aspire to **flexible forms of work**; v) better composure of the employee, who has the possibility of a **calmer environment** for more demanding work tasks; vi) **individual arrangement of working days**.⁷⁹

If employers' associations and organizations highlighted to a greater extent the positive aspects of working at home and/or remote work, **trade unions** - along with the positive aspects - also highlighted some (potentially) **vaguely agreed on aspects**, which could make working from home have some **negative consequences** for employees, also from the point of view of balancing professional and private life. Thus, for example, the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia highlighted the following **undefined pitfalls** of working from home: i) **not every job can be done from home**; ii) the **time burden on the employee**, because with an inadequate legal basis, such a flexible form of work can lead to the employee being available 24 hours a day⁸⁰; iii) the challenge of **recording working hours**; iv) **lack of social contact**; v) the problem of **inadequate powers** of the Labour Inspectorate to **supervise work**, especially when **injuries occur** (e.g. a slip in the bathroom, an injury in the kitchen). To summarise, we can write that the **biggest challenge** for balancing work and private life is the **mix of work and privacy**, as the schedule quickly becomes flexible to the

⁷⁹ Žurnal. (2020). Delo od doma: na nekaterih ministrstvih jih od doma dela precej, na drugih nihče. Available at: <https://www.zurnal24.si/slovenija/delo-od-doma-na-nekaterih-ministrstvih-jih-od-doma-dela-precej-na-drugih-nihce-339983>

⁸⁰ It is about the idea that the work process is physically interrupted by going home.

point that the employee can be available all the time (even at the expense of performing other daily duties during the morning) .

5.3. Examples of good practices of working from home in Slovenia

The Research on good practices of managing diversity and promoting equality in small and medium-sized enterprises in Slovenia (*Raziskava dobrih praks in upravljanja raznolikosti in spodbujanja enakosti v malih in srednjih podjetjih v Sloveniji*), which was commissioned in 2019 by the **Advocate of the Principle of Equality of the Republic of Slovenia**, summarizes a number of different examples of good practices for promoting the coordination of professional and private life (Advocate of the Principle of Equality, 2019)⁸¹. **Two good examples** are pointed out, where which **working from home has made a key contribution to improving the position of the employee**, especially from the point of view of reconciliation of professional and private life. In the first case, an **employee of the company reported that she was already on the verge of burnout**, as **she was taking care** of her **partner's sick parents** in her **free time** (and often during her work duties - it could also be caring responsibilities for a child). Since **caring responsibilities** in most cases in Slovenian society are **assumed by women**, it is – as stated in the report – extremely important that, if they wish to continue working, they are given such conditions so that they can appropriately schedule their work responsibilities. In the specific case, the employee attended therapy with her partner's father three times a week in the morning hours. After the introduced measure (and a conversation with the management), **she was enabled to perform missed work obligations three times a week in the afternoon from home** (Advocate of the principle of equality, 2019, p. 121).

Another example is a successful company that is sustainable and relies on the knowledge and talents of its employees. At the same time, the Report (2019, p. 119) points out that the company has 71 employees, of which women make up 61% of all employees - the CEO is a woman, who is also the only woman among all the CEOs of the countries where the company has its retail network. At the expense of such diversity and the **pursuit of gender equality**, the company has introduced various

⁸¹ Zagovornik načela enakosti. (2019). *Raziskava dobrih praks in upravljanja raznolikosti in spodbujanja enakosti v malih in srednjih podjetjih v Sloveniji*. Available at <http://www.zagovornik.si/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Dobre-prakse-raznolikost-in-enakost-v-MSP-2019.pdf>

measures that **encourage flexible working hours and work from home**, thereby greatly contributing to the potential of work-life balance (ibid.). Finally, it is also worth noting that there has been a **Family Friendly Company certificate** in Slovenia since **2007**, which has already certified **240** Slovenian companies and organizations employing over **80,000 employees**. The employees of these companies/organizations also reported on various aspects of improvements in the area of work-life balance as a result of measures taken at the level of organizations/companies, which is one of the fundamental goals of such certification.⁸²

6. Changes in the workplace environment during Covid-19 – the meaning of work from home in Norway

In this chapter, which consists of three subchapters, we discuss changes in the workplace environment during the Covid-19 epidemic in Norway, with a focus on work from home. The first subchapter is intended to illustrate the **existing situation in the field of work from home in Norway**. The latter is based on the analysis of accessible Norwegian and other foreign researches, which were carried out with the aim of discovering the **latest trends regarding work from home**. In the second chapter, we focus on the positive and negative aspects of working at home, or on the **opportunities and pitfalls** that such work brings for individuals with different personal circumstances, such as **parenthood and different professional profiles**. In the third chapter, we identify **examples of good practices of working from home** in Norway, with regard to gender mainstreaming in company operations.

6.1. Overview of existing situation of working from home in Norway

In Norway, before the Covid-19 epidemic, there was no special distinction between remote work and work from home – the latter was simply the most used form of remote work. Between **2010 and 2020**⁸³, the percentage of **employees who often worked from home** grew from **3.9% to 4.9%**, which is much lower than the **average** of all

⁸² **For more examples of good practices:** Ekvilib. (2015). Usklajevanje zasebnega in poklicnega življenja v praksi: izkušnje z izvajanjem projekta Certifikat Družini prijazno podjetje v Sloveniji. Available at: <http://www.certifikatdpp.si/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/EKVILIB-Institut-Izkusnje-z-izvajanjem-projekta-certifikat-druzini-prijazno-podjetje-v-SLO-A4-2015-Low.pdf>

⁸³ Statista. (2022). Share of employees who occasionally work from home in Norway from 2010 to 2020, by frequency. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1218121/share-of-employees-who-occasionally-work-from-home-in-norway-by-frequency/>

European countries, which was **12.3%** in **2020**⁸⁴. The number of employees who occasionally work from home has, of course, changed drastically with the arrival of the Covid-19 epidemic. In April 2022, the Labour Research Institute (*Arbeidsforskningsinstituttet*) prepared a **Report on work from home**⁸⁵ in Norway, which was commissioned by the Norwegian Ministry of Labor and Equal Opportunities. The report is based on a number of surveys on the **trends and consequences of working from home**, as the latter has reached enormous proportions during the Covid-19 epidemic in Norway. According to the latest data (April 2022), the Report on work from home states (p. 2-3) that **50% of Norwegians can work from home**, depending on the various employment profiles. In **2021**, due to government measures to control the Covid-19 epidemic, **59% of employees worked from home**, and this percentage decreased significantly to **37% in 2022**. Compared to 2021 (9%), in 2022 18% of employees also had a contract or annex to the contract, which defines the rights and duties related to working from home. Research has shown that approximately **7 out of 10** employees in 2021 and 2022 (around 72%) wanted to at least **partially work from home**, with responses concentrated around **one or two days a week** (ibid.).

Before and at the beginning of Covid-19 epidemic, there were no specific legal regulations in Norway that regulated the rights and duties of employers and employees for working from home, at least not to the extent that was later required by Covid-19 (exact definition of hours, protection of employees when working from home). On **July 1, 2022** (Strømman, 2022)⁸⁶, new **legal provisions entered into force** in Norway, which are the result of collective negotiations regarding the **necessary requirements for the protection of male and female workers** who regularly, occasionally or temporarily **work from home**. The new legal obligations for working at home now stipulate⁸⁷:

⁸⁴ Statista. (2022). Percentage of employed people usually working from home in Europe 2020, by country. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/879251/employees-teleworking-in-the-eu/>

⁸⁵ Arbeidsforskningsinstituttet. (2022). Hjemme–Borte–Uavgjort. Hjemmekontor og annet fjernarbeid: Kartlegging av omfang, utviklingstrekk og konsekvenser. Available at: https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/departementene/aid/bilder/pensjon-trygd-og-sosiale-tjenester/r2022_04-hjemme-borte-uavgjort-25042022.pdf

⁸⁶ Strømman, B. E. (2022). New regulations regarding work from home. Norway's Tax Blog. Available at: <https://blogg.pwc.no/skattebloggen-en/new-regulations-regarding-work-from-home>

⁸⁷ Dfø. (2022). Arbeidssted. Available at: <https://arbeidsgiver.dfo.no/personaloppfolging/arbeidssted>

- 1) Regular or provisional work from home is defined by an **annex to the an employment contract**;
- 2) work from home is defined as a **possible additional form of employment** for a certain period of time;
- 3) the **employment contract or annex must specify the number of working hours**, which must not exceed **37.5 hours per week**,
- 4) in relation to healthy and safe working conditions when working at home, the **employer issues an instruction**, and the **employee gives a statement** that his work at home meets the requirements prescribed in the **safety statement with risk assessment**;
- 5) the employee's need for work resources is defined and the **employer** accordingly **provides compensation for the use of own work resources**,
- 6) the **employer must provide service repairs** for the **equipment** required for working from home,
- 7) the **protection of privacy and business secrets is defined**.

6.2. Opportunities and pitfalls of working from home in Norway

The Report on work from home (pp. 52-61) highlights both the **positive and negative aspects of working from home**, which are based on a survey conducted in 2022 on workers and employers. The condition for participating in the survey for workers was that the latter work at home at least once a week, and the included employers employed at least one person who worked from home at least once a week. It is important to emphasize that the **majority of surveyed workers** had access to a **home office** - a separate space in which an individual can perform work duties in peace -, and the survey was carried out when **educational institutions** were **opened** and workers no longer performed work from home and cared for children at the same time. The **main benefits** of working from home identified by respondents include: i) the **flexibility** offered by working from home, ii) **less stress and sick leave**, iii) **more personal time** because there is **no commuting to the workplace**, iv) **increased trust between employee and employer**, v) **greater employee motivation**. The survey also showed that workers who work from home mostly agreed (54%) that they do not think about work at the end of the working day and that work obligations do not burden them in their personal time (ibid.).

As the central **negative aspects** of working at home, workers and employers pointed out: i) the **absence of maintaining a work culture** that is best developed in the **office**, ii) **insufficient communication with colleagues**, iii) the feeling of workers that **working at home takes away potential opportunities for networking**, iv) **dependence on digital tools** when establishing **new relationships with potential clients/business partners**, v) the **need for more efficient organization of work and personal time** (ibid.). A 2020 survey⁸⁸ already showed that Norwegians were very divided when it came to communicating and meeting online. Even then, due to the Covid-19 epidemic, 61% of all employees used digital tools for work meetings, of which 37% agreed that online meetings are more effective than live meetings, and 33% wanted live meetings instead online (24% were unspecified). The research presented in the Report on work from home confirmed the **concerns of workers** that one of the major disadvantages of working at home is the **lack of social contacts** that enable **smooth communication** and **building relationships** among **employees** as well as building relationships with **customers and business partners**.

6.3. Examples of good practices of working from home in Norway

Smith et al. (2021)⁸⁹ singled out **Telenor**, a **multinational telecommunications operator** that is also present on the Norwegian market, as a good practice of working from home. At the very beginning of the Covid-19 epidemic, Telenor implemented an **extremely flexible form of work**, where employees could choose **where and when they would work**. **Communication** between employees and the **transfer of key information** was solved with the so-called **group manifesto**, within which each **working group/department** defined which **tasks and meetings** will be carried out from **home, in a hybrid format or at the workplace**. Also, the working groups/teams have determined in advance the days when everyone can be present at the workplace. Group manifestos are and still work as living organisms, which workers use to continuously **balance work and personal time**, which allows them to practically seamlessly coordinate their professional and private lives (ibid.).

⁸⁸ Statista. (2020). Do you find digital meetings more efficient than physical meetings? Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1218093/opinions-on-efficiency-of-digital-meetings-in-norway/>

⁸⁹ Smite, D., Moe, N. B., Hildrum, J., Gonzalez Huerta, J. in Mendez, D. (2021). Work-From-Home is Here to Stay: Call for Flexibility in Post-Pandemic Work Policies. V Harvard Business Review, 98(6), 58–67. Available at <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2203.11136.pdf>

As one of the good practices, it is necessary to point out the successful engineering consultancy company in Norway, **Multiconsult**, which operates in areas such as construction, renewable energy sources and transport. In 2017, the company had problems identifying the needs of workers in the area of balancing professional and private life, and managers were also aware of the need to include gender equality policies in company's operations. In the same year, the company initially set itself **4 key goals** that addressed the then lack of gender equality at various levels of the company: i) **at least 30% of women in management positions**, ii) **balanced gender representation in project management and professional positions**, iii) **balanced recruitment of both sexes** (both men and women must be present in the last round of interviews) and iv) **reduction of wage gap** between men and women, according to current statistics of the industry in which the company operates. The results of the objectives were **measured after three years** and showed the sincere efforts of the company (MASP, n. d., p. 9)⁹⁰.

Figure 7: Results measured after three years of implementing measures that promote gender equality

Goal (2017)	Status (October 2020)
at least 30% of women in management positions	43% of women in management positions, 50% of women in the board of directors of the company and a female CEO
balanced gender representation in project management and professional positions	there are no exact measurements, but about 40% of women in management and professional positions, the largest increase (2%) was in the architecture department
balanced recruitment of both sexes	both men and women were present in 95% of all interview rounds
reduction of wage gap	Index stands at 99.9 – significant improvements, but women still earn less than male employees

⁹⁰ MASP. (n. d.). Work-life balance in the North, executive summary. Available at: <http://economiaelavoro.comune.milano.it/sites/default/files/2022-03/WP3.%20Norwegian%20Best%20Practices%20Executive%20Summary%20Report.pdf>

Source: MASP, p. 9

In **2020**, with the onset of Covid-19, a large part of the **work** at Multiconsult **shifted to working from home**, which meant the urgent identification of the needs of employees to balance their professional and private lives. Despite the specific sector of the company (consulting), the results of working from home were extremely promising and even when the Norwegian government removed measures for working from home in February 2022, the company decided to keep occasional work from home. To this decision, they also **adapted all the training courses** that are regularly held in the company, so that they are now **available in the form of webinars on a separately designed online platform** for employees who work from home. The **website** also **provides guidelines** for employees regarding the **daily challenges** they may face when working from home, which they can use for a smooth work process⁹¹.

⁹¹ Multiconsult. (2021). Annual Report 2021. Dostopno prek: <https://www.multiconsult.no/assets/Multiconsult-Annual-report-2021-PDF.pdf>

7. Conclusion

The purpose of the analysis and overview of the existing situation (hereinafter referred to as the Analysis) was **to offer a comprehensive framework** for the start of the **development of guidelines and measures** as well as an **interactive online content** for reconciliation of professional and private life. The Analysis not only serves as a framework for the continuation of the PROMETEJ project, but also **fills a gap** in the field of **understanding the dimensions of the coordination of professional and private life** through the interplay of **three levels** (social, organizational and individual). By doing so, the Analysis contributed to the understanding of how reconciliation of professional and private life was affected during Covid-19 epidemic with the introduction of work from home. The findings showed that **Slovenia** is one of those countries that has – from the point of view of legislation – **a robust framework** that enables **the implementation of measures** in the field of harmonizing **professional and private life** with an emphasis on the **inclusion of men**. In this way, the **social level is set appropriately**, as it enables the **addressing of gender stereotypes** at the **organizational and individual level** with the aim of **reducing the unequal position** of women and men in terms of **caring responsibilities**. The latter - regardless of the fact that the framework allows for a good coordination of professional and private life - are **still distinctly in the domain of women**, which is why the incidence of the **double burden in Slovenia is that much higher**.

The analysis also offered practical aspects regarding the organization of work itself and the work environment, so that measures in the field of balancing professional and private life would be more successful. One of the important aspects is the so-called **flexibilization of working hours and/or working from home**, which is also pointed out by good practices. There are also certain **challenges** that are inherently associated with this type of paradigm shift in the workplace, but the experiences in this field now exist, and certain organizational cultures of companies have already **internalized this type of work**. This means that such practices have **spillover potential** with the goal of providing the right conditions for balancing professional and private life. One of the more important aspects of the Analysis was the **contextualization of the importance of gender equality** for the very implementation of measures to strengthen the coordination of professional and private life. This mainly

refers to the **potential of involving men in caring and household work**, in order to achieve the **principle of equal inclusion of women in the labor market**. To achieve this, a shift is needed not only at the societal level, but also at the organizational level. The results show that many men **do not know enough** about the field (and thus **their rights**), and many of them are trapped in such an organizational culture of the company that does not allow them to be involved in caring and household tasks. It is therefore important that education in this field focuses on the **importance and role of men in reducing the double burden** and more **equal integration of women into the labor market**.

Finally, it is also worth highlighting the **potential and opportunities** of the Analysis for the **social level** itself - there are certain legal areas that could be improved in terms of public policy in order to achieve adequate gender equality in the labor market and a better coordination of professional and private life. If **employers** had more room to decide on **rewards, stimulations and (financial) help** for their employees in this area (the issue of credit ratings and the amount of assistance from the point of view of tax bases), employers could also become more and **more competitive on the market**, and their **employees** more and **more satisfied and productive** because they could realize the potential of balancing professional and private life. In this context, the **decision-makers** will be able to - when regulating the framework of working from home - also **address** this aspect with the aim of **implementing the Directive**, which Slovenia will have to implement into its legal system this year.

8. Literature

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