

Work and family: The way to care is to share!

Motherhood and the gendered division of labour that places primary responsibility for maintaining the home and family on women are important determinants of gender-based inequalities between the sexes and of inequalities among women. Conflict between these family responsibilities and the demands of work contributes significantly to women's disadvantage in the labour market and the sluggish progress towards equal opportunity and treatment for men and women in employment. While women are forced, or choose, to accept poorly-paid, insecure, part-time, home-based or informal work in order to combine their family responsibilities with their paid employment, difficulties in reconciling the demands of work and family contribute to men's disadvantage in the family and limit their ability to be involved in family matters. Workplace schedules that do not take into account workers' family responsibilities can constitute indirect discrimination in that they force such workers to "under-perform" in terms of participation in workplace activities and thus potentially damage their career development prospects. In particular, women's career advancement may suffer when they take a "career break" longer than the statutory maternity leave for the purposes of family care or take up parental leave provisions immediately after maternity leave.

However, there has recently been an increasing recognition of the importance of devising measures to help reconcile workers' family responsibilities with their work – a key strategy to facilitate women's greater participation in decent work. As clearer links have been established between the achievement of equality between women and men at home and at the workplace, the issue of harmonizing employment and family commitments for both women and men has emerged as an important labour and social policy theme in a growing number of countries. Convention No. 156 sees equality of opportunity as the overall objective of work–family measures. However, not all work–family measures promote equality. As noted in a recent ILO Global Report: "There is a danger that work/family policies, which are often aimed implicitly or explicitly at women in particular, may end up reinforcing the image of women as 'secondary earners' and accruing to the double burden of working women".

Flexibility in working conditions and in social security should be promoted through:

- the progressive reduction of hours of work and the reduction of the amount of required overtime;
- the introduction of flexible arrangements in working schedules, rest periods and holidays;
- consideration of the place of employment of the spouse and the educational possibilities for children in the case of transfer from one locality to another;
- the regulation and supervision of terms and conditions of employment of part-time workers, workers on temporary contracts and homeworkers: all terms and conditions of employment, including social security should be equivalent to those of full-time and permanent workers;
- consideration of family responsibilities as a valid reason for refusal of an offer of employment (for the purpose of avoiding the loss or suspension of unemployment benefits).

Find out more:

[ILO – Conditions of Work and Employment Programme \(TRAVAIL\): Work and family](#)
[ILO – International Standards Department \(NORMES\)](#)
[ILO – Bureau for Workers' Activities \(ACTRAV\): Harmonization of Work and Family Responsibilities](#)
[ILO – Bureau for Employers' Activities \(ACT/EMP\): Diversity and Equality](#)
[C156 Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981](#)
[R165 Workers with Family Responsibilities Recommendation, 1981](#)
[Resource Guide - Gender equality in the world of work](#)
[Gender Equality and Decent Work - Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations Promoting Gender Equality - \[pdf 703 KB\]](#)