

CAREER AND PARENTHOOD

Towards an Empowering Balance

2023











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This publication was co-funded by the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF). Its contents are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the AEIF. The AEIF does not accept any responsibility for use that may be made of the information it contains.

Career and Parenthood: Towards an Empowering Balance Good Employer Practices

In order to attract and retain employees, contemporary companies seek to find ways to ensure a work-life balance.1

For employees with family commitments, these measures are of particular relevance and very necessary. A 2023 study by the Lithuanian Diversity Charter revealed that one in three employees returning from parental leave changed jobs, most often due to the lack of employer's flexibility. The failure to review remuneration and/or remuneration decrease in comparison to that of colleagues was also mentioned as an important reason for changing jobs, although it was not the main one.2

In this review, we present employers' best practices in achieving a work-life balance. They were collected between February and April 2023 by interviewing 10 companies operating in Lithuania and 15 employer representatives. The interviews were conducted with foreign and Lithuanian private sector companies of different sizes.

The interviews were intended to collect the following information: a) the variety of measures applied at the company to reconcile family and work, b) communication practices, c) the effectiveness and impact of the initiatives in question on employees and the employer.

https://diversity.lt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Karjera_ir_-

vaiku_prieziura_Studija.pdf

¹ Scambors E, Gartner M. (2019). Barriers and supportive conditions for caring masculinities. Theory in Praksa. Vol. 56 4/2019, pp. 1087-1104. Petikonis-Šabanienė B., Šeimos ir karieros derinimas: praktikos ir rekomendacijos (Reconciling Family and Career: Practices and Recommendations)

² Lithuanian Diversity Charter. Every Third Employee Chooses Between Family and Career. Survey results. https://diversity.lt/kas-trecias-darbuotojas-renkasi-tarp-seimos-ir-karjeros/ Karjera ir vaikų priežiūra: link įgalinančio balanso (Career and Childcare: Towards an Empowering Balance):, 2023

Practices in the Application of Statutory Measures to Reconcile Family and Work

Regardless of the size of the companies and the nature of their activities, the representatives involved in the survey stated that statutory measures are applied at the workplace without any exceptions.

To facilitate the application of the measures provided for in the Labour Code, companies have internal systems, which help in the administration of these measures and at the same time remind employees of the possibility to use them.

In most cases, staff have access to the internal systems for requesting days off, mothers'/fathers' days off, holidays, flexible working hours, etc. According to the respondents, managers view these requests favourably: "There is hardly any issue about someone taking a mother's/fathers' day off; we do not have any problems with that at all. People use the benefits they are used to and we simply cannot imagine anything different" (V_4, all enterprises have a similar practice, even if there are no systems in place).

The respondents claimed that the workplace is always kept for mothers and fathers until they return from their parental leave. They can be informed in advance about reorganisation or other changes, but in this case other positions are offered: "It may happen that the position they used to occupy will have been removed, [...] but we inform them about the fact that we are looking for another option, i.e. we look for an option acceptable to both parties" (V_4).

The interviewed company representatives note that currently young fathers tend to take a month-long paternity leave and use their father's days off to look after sick children at home: We have very few cases, if any at all, of fathers saying that "we don't want to use that month of paternity leave", or "we want to take a shorter leave". However, fathers are less likely to take a longer parental leave. For example, one company noted that out of more than 100 employees who took parental leaves, only three were men (V 3). Employers are considering options to encourage fathers to take a parental leave and organise events to showcase examples of active fathers.

Flexible and hybrid working and teleworking are becoming increasingly commonplace. The

interviewed employer representatives emphasised that the most important thing for the company is to achieve results by providing a comfortable environment for employees. In summary, we can distinguish the following corporate practices:

Companies set a range of working hours in the ▶ middle of the working day when employees are obliged to be at the office or available if teleworking. In other cases, flexible working hours are possible. This practice allows employees with

children to take them to the kindergarten and

pick them up from there after work.

Companies set two to three days a week when all employees are expected to come and work in the office, with other days remaining flexible.

- ► A completely flexible schedule is applied. Returning mothers do not need any integration period after the parental leave, as they plan their working hours to fit in with their family commitments. According to the manager of one interviewed company, employees are very positive about this option and the company's performance has improved since the introduction of this measure, (V_8).
- Teleworking from home was introduced during the COVID 19 pandemic and continues to this day. Companies usually adopt teleworking guidelines. This option is mainly used by mothers who look after their children at home: "The working day has no structure, because, for example, I have to cook lunch, feed the kids,
- and then, having calmed down and responded to the needs of the family, I can sit down in the evening [and work]" (V_6).

Some companies make it possible to work from another city or country for 15 or 30 days a year. This practice becomes especially popular with the onset of holidays in educational institutions.

It has been noticed that employees make use of family and work reconciliation means they are entitled to: "We don't track the hours that people do. We say that it is the result we most care about. If your child is sick and you manage to complete [a task] in 5 hours rather than 8, then that's great." (V_3, similar practice in V_8). However, these opportunities also depend on the sector. In manufacturing, sales and other sectors, employees may agree to swop their working hours with their colleagues (V_1, V_6, V_9).

Additional Measures for the Reconciliation of Work and Family Life

Apart from that, employers tend to offer additional measures for employees with family commitments, even if the Labour Code does not provide for them. For example:

- a) space for children at the workplace;
- b) part-time work for full pay;
- c) salary increase practices, fringe benefits and other initiatives.

SPACE FOR CHILDREN AT THE WORKPLACE

Half of the companies interviewed have equipped rooms for employees' children. It can be a room for playing and for homework: "small tables, computer, TV, toys, books, some soft things to suit the children of all ages" (V 3). In one case, the employer's personal need to equip a space for her young child led to the creation of a room for the offspring of all employees: "We had an official room for all children, not just for mine." (V_7). Another company employs a childcare employee: "You come to work, bring your child to our building and leave them with a childcare employee for a really low price. The children would receive lunch." (V 3).

Company representatives shared that primary school children often come to their workplace, where they are given a room to do homework or play table or educational games (V_4, V_5, V 7). Several respondents shared that their company organises computer literacy classes or children's day camps for employees' children who "can hang out, spend that time with the teacher, and then they can come to their mum or dad's place of work, and after that they can just go home together in the evening." (V_4, V 6). Sometimes children come to the working parents for lunch "or to drink hot chocolate with mom at work - ... that is the best part." Some companies fully or partially reimburse children's camps. One company organises summer day camps where parents bring their children at the beginning of work and pick them up after work. $(V_10).$

PART-TIME WORK AT FULL PAY

One company shared a practice that has been in place for three years, whereby employees returning from parental leave can work part-time (50%) for the first month and receive full pay. This measure applies for one month only to help employees integrate into the workplace "to allow them to organise their personal life routines, such as kindergartens, schools, babysitters, etc." (V_1). As the employer observes, employees appreciate this practice very much: "The first days when returning after 12 or 18 months of leave certainly present many challenges, and the opportunity [...] to have a little more freedom during the first month without losing income is really appreciated." (V_1).

SALARY INCREASE AND COMPENSATION PRACTICES, FRINGE BENEFITS AND **OTHER INITIATIVES**

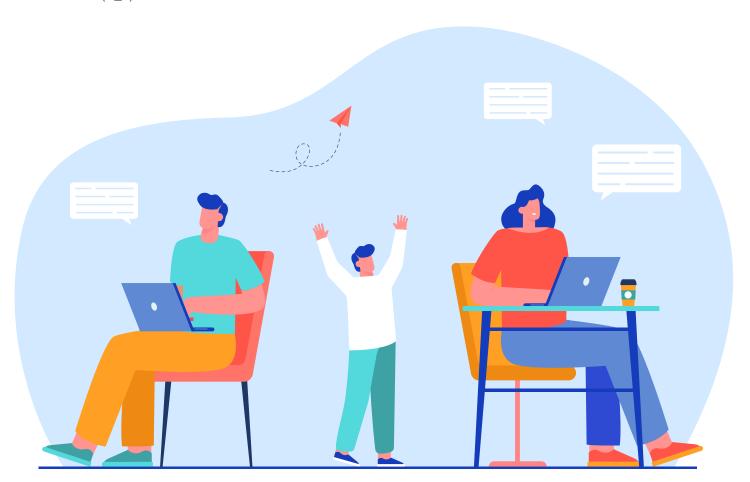
7 out of 10 companies have adopted the practice of reviewing the annual salary for employees on parental leave: "3 years ago, we noticed a trend of a 5-10% pay gap and a sort of exclusion when an employee returns from parental leave. [...] Our salary review is directly linked to the performance review of those employees who skipped it due to being on parental leave [...] We raise the salary in line with the progress noted during the performance assessment." (V_1) According to the respondents, this measure gives the employee a sense of security and trust in the employer: "It used to feel rather awkward when you come back and have to negotiate." (V_10).

INCOME COMPENSATION

2 out of 10 companies have taken targeted measures for both the mother and the father to have the opportunity to raise their children without losing income. One company has incentives for dads to encourage them to actively take advantage of parental leave: "What do we do extra? The Labor Code provides for time to be allocated, while we make sure that the employee's income does not decrease. Which means that the mothers receive 100% of the salary for 4 months. If the fathers decide to use those 2 months, they also keep 100% percent of their salary. This means that we compensate the difference between the benefits paid by the Social Insurance Fund and 100% of the salary." (V 1). Another company follows the same practice for its office staff and covers the difference in salary compared to the Social Insurance Fund benefits for both mothers and fathers (V_9).

ADDITIONAL INITIATIVES

Companies tend to offer additional benefits, for example, additional health insurance for the employee and their family members, payments to parents after the birth of a child, additional days off for fathers before the birth of a child, one-off payments for parents of first-year schoolchildren, additional days off for those raising children with disabilities. Some companies have short-term sick leave days, volunteering and health promotion days: They are all programmed in the human resources system and can be reserved at the employee's convenience. [...] Each person sees how many days they are entitled to and how many they have used. If exceeded, then the system does not allow to register more days." (V 3). The company also offers an extra half day before the big holidays so that employees can leave work earlier, avoid traffic jams, etc. (V_7).





Methods Used by Companies to Clarify Employees' Needs

The analysis of the study data shows that companies seek to clarify and respond to employees' needs for work-life balance. The following methods are being used:

- a) regular surveys by means of a questionnaire;
- b) focus groups;
- c) exit interviews;
- d) internal corporate communication channels;
- e) communication with social partners (Works Councils);
- f) informal parent groups.

SURVEYS Allow employers to assess whether the measures and initiatives offered are in line with employees' expectations. The surveys ask about cooperation with one's manager and how the employee feels about it. Is your colleagues' conduct in line with your values, do you enjoy work-life balance and are you able to maintain it?" (V_3). Various employee surveys provide an opportunity to record comments or observations: "Those comments result in certain insights, on which we work later, therefore the surveys do not end up dusting in the drawer." $(V_10).$

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND EXIT INTERVIEWS

In order to find out about employees' experiences and aspects of reconciliation of family and professional life, several focus group discussions were held in one company with different focus groups: a) female employees who were about to take parental leave, b) female employees who had returned from parental leave, and c) female employees who had not returned to the workplace. This method helped to check the functioning of the company's measures and to identify weaknesses that cause anxiety or stress in the team (V_3). Other companies use individual exit interviews to find out the reasons for quitting the workplace and how they relate to the lack of work-life balance. (V_2, V_4)

INTERNAL CORPORATE COMMUNICATION **CHANNELS**

6 out of 10 companies said they have informal groups on their social networks where the employer is an active participant as well: "On our part, we try to offer additional benefits. There is a lot of communication about holidays and leaves, reconciliation of work and childcare. In addition, we try to remind [employees] about the days off they are entitled to take, etc.". (V 4). Another company has an internal online platform for employees to share their parenting experiences. Fathers were very positive about this kind of communication and information sharing: "We talked to the men who came back from parental leave, and they now claim that they feel much more comfortable returning to us, [...] "... if I keep contact, at least I am aware what is happening in my and other teams, and at our company in general. (V_3). For example, the last article was about our group CFO. What does it mean to be a group CFO and a young dad who has 2 small children? When he had his first child, he was Head of the department, and when he had his second child, he was already a Board member. So how can one reconcile their duties? This only demonstrates that it is okay to have children and for everyone to know that." (V_3). It is noteworthy that sharing personal stories is influential because it tells the experiences of specific people that the team knows and works with.

SOCIAL PARTNERS

Another informal source of information is the social partners. "It may as well be, for example, the representatives of the Works Council. These colleagues have some suggestions, ideas. All ideas are considered, debated and if they are acceptable and we see some value for employees, they are implemented." (V_4).

PARENT GROUPS

4 out of 10 companies said that their workplace has a Parents' and/or Guardians' Group which communicates with the HR department or management teams and informs them on issues discussed in their group, such as problems with flexible working arrangements, flexible working hours, teleworking during children's holidays etc. "The discussion was started by one of the company managers whose husband had taken parental leave, thus enabling her to pursue a career. She encouraged women to speak up, to have the courage to express their preferences towards professional growth, to discuss them openly with company managers as well to break the established norms and stereotypes about women's and men's roles in the family." (V_2).



Communication with Employees on Parental Leave

Almost all employer representatives have reported that they seek to maintain contact with the employees who are on parental leave. They said that it is important to communicate with employees when they are about to take parental leave and when they are already on parental leave (with their consent). Employers also take into account employees' wishes to temporarily leave work aside and to immerse themselves only into family responsibilities.

According to the respondents, the most successful communication channels were the following:

- a) memos to employees;
- b) memos to the manager;
- c) regular communication with the employee;
- d) newsletters;
- e) informal events.

MEMOS TO EMPLOYEES

Several employers have said that their companies have clear procedures for what should be done when I learn I am expecting a child"; "What to do next [...] if the dad wants to take parental leave?", "I am on parental leave, thinking about returning to work earlier, what should I do?" They all have access to that information and get that memo." (V 3). With such memos for employees, companies inform them about the procedures to be followed at all stages from the beginning of maternity leave to the end of the parental leave and what benefits the employee is entitled to. (V_6)

MEMOS TO THE MANAGER

The manager is also given information on what to do if their team members are pregnant, take parental leave or want to return to work early. Such memos provide guidance on how to plan and conduct interviews with employees who have reported that they are expecting a child or are taking parental leave. The memo contains all the information that the manager has to convey. If the employee is on parental leave, the manager is advised on how to keep in touch, where to find information on whether the employee has given consent to be contacted during this period. If the duration of the employee's parental leave is coming to an end (six months or 30 calendar days before returning, depending on the company), the manager receives an automatic reminder that the time is approaching when a member of their team has to return after parental leave. After receiving the email reminder, managers should contact the person to find out about their plans and other relevant issues (V_3, V_4, V_6).

REGULAR COMMUNICATION AND KEEPING IN TOUCH SO THAT THE EMPLOYEE FEELS PART OF THE TEAM

Half of the companies have general guidelines for communication between manager and employee during parental leave, but many emphasise that the manager and employee agree on communication during parental leave on a case-by-case basis: [How often] they will call each other, what news they will discuss, etc." (V 1). This practice has proven itself effective: some employees need regular calls because they do not want to lose contact with their workplace, others do not feel the need for this. (V_3) According to the respondents, the practice of managers keeping regular contact with

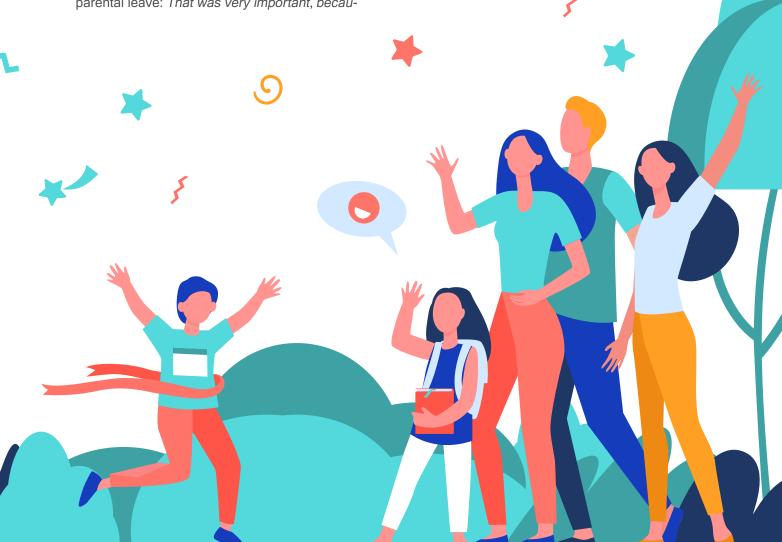
employees and informing them about ongoing restructuring, the introduction of new posts and tasks, etc. has proven to be successful. "Just to avoid any shock for those employees when they return." (V_10).

NEWSLETTERS

4 out of 10 companies issue monthly or quarterly newsletters and send them to all employees, including those on parental leave, if they have accepted to receive them. This communication channel is a reminder of what is happening in the company, and which activities the employee can join. It also provides information on changes in legislation or in the economic sector in which the company operates. A company representative told us that she had interviewed mothers who receive newsletters while they were on parental leave: That was very important, because she said, "I feel well, I feel like I am part of [the team]". (V_3).

INFORMAL EVENTS

Employers' representatives invite mothers and fathers with children to come to organised holidays, festivities, excursions, retreats and other events. According to the respondents, employees who are on parental leave are very keen to participate, they want to meet and spend that time with colleagues. These informal events are important so that employees on parental leave feel safe and not detached from company life. Employees on parental leave and those temporarily absent can also use the gym, massages and other services intended for the team.



Factors Encouraging the Use of work - life balance tools

The respondents told us that family and work reconciliation measures are effectively implemented when they are supported by managers, when career opportunities are encouraged and additional programs are offered to employees.

WORKING WITH MANAGERS

Days off for mothers or fathers are one of the most popular tools used by employees with family commitments. The role of the manager in this process is very important, since it depends on them whether the measure will be applied. The systems developed in companies allow one to monitor whether employees take advantage of the days off meant for spending with children they are entitled to. If an employee fails to use the days off meant for mothers or fathers for three months, a notice appears saying "that the employee has not yet taken their day off". (V_3). In such cases, the HR department contacts managers and asks them to remind employees that "time with the family is important and serious." (V_3). Employees welcome the proactive role of managers and accept this as good practice at the workplace.3

ENCOURAGING COOPERATION BETWEEN MANAGERS AND THEIR TEAM MEMBERS

Representatives of the four companies shared that they encourage cooperation between managers and their team members. HR department professionals work with both employees and managers. Employees are encouraged to accept the manager as "the best partner in finding ways to change careers, move forward, seek balance, etc." (V_4). HR department specialists organise individual training sessions and provide professional information on how to prepare for an interview with one's manager. HR department specialists also work with managers, advising them and helping them prepare for interviews with their team members.

According to one company representative, working with managers is essential for them to acquire practical managerial and teamwork skills: "For example, managers are of very different maturity level, [...] some are certainly

experts in their field, but sometimes they lack [leadership skills due to inexperience]." (V 3). Managers are reminded by HR department specialists to contact employees on parental leave at least two or three months before returning and to talk to them, ask about plans, discuss options for returning, etc. This is a necessary communication, especially if the manager has changed and does not even know the employee (V_9, V_10). When a job position becomes available, the company's HR specialists encourage the manager to contact employees on parental leave and offer the opportunity, even though the employee had taken the leave for two years. These prompts are necessary for managers, because sometimes they forget to consider those on parental leave (V_10).

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FAMILY AND **WORK ARRANGEMENTS DEPENDS ON THE** SUPPORT OF TOP AND MIDDLE-LEVEL **MANAGERS**

For example, a company representative shared her experience about the possibility for parents returning from parental leave to work part-time for the first month and receive a full salary: "When we approached the management team with this programme, I remember how worried I was, because I did not want to be asked how much it was going to cost the business and how we were going to get by. And all this is related to money, [...] but you know, all managers were supportive, they said << it will be so good for our employees>>. [...] Afterwards, the engagement and support for programmes automatically spreads within the company." (V_1). "It is important to be allowed to participate in vocational training during working hours, then we don't have to stay after work, we don't have to go somewhere, we just plan that during working hours and take the classes we need." (V_6).

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

To meet employees' expectations for career development, to improve their professional competences and, consequently, to have opportunities to apply their skills, almost all the companies interviewed offer training, counselling and mentoring. This is particularly relevant for those returning from parental leave, when, due to restructuring or other reasons, their previous position had disappeared (V_4). Sometimes returning to a previous position after a sufficiently long timespan can feel like taking a new position (V_2). Therefore, companies are increasingly offering and paying for the training in professional competences chosen by the employees.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT MEASURES FOR **EMPLOYEES**

Some companies provide an opportunity to seek and receive psychological support for themselves and their families 24/7: There is a possibility to receive anonymous expert counse*Iling via email or telephone.*" (V_1). The need for such counselling increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and the company hires independent external specialists. Other companies offer three free psychologist's sessions. If more sessions are required, it is possible to pay for them through supplementary health insurance scheme (V_6). A survey of employees shows that the need for psychological support is growing.4

⁴ Karjera ir vaikų priežiūra: link įgalinančio balanso (Carreer and Childcare: Towards an Empowering Balance), 2023 https://diversity.lt/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Karjera_ir_vaiku_prieziura_Studija.pdf



³ Karjera ir vaikų priežiūra: link įgalinančio balanso (Career and Childcare: Towards an Empowering Balance), 2023 https://diversity.l $t/wp\text{-}content/uploads/2023/04/Karjera_ir_vaiku_prieziura_Studija.pdf$



Benefits of Family and Work Reconciliation Measures

All the respondents noted that family and work reconciliation measures result in a number of benefits for employees and employers.

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYEES

Well-being, security and stress relief when reconciling family and professional commitments. The vast majority of employees welcome flexible working arrangements, which have become one of the main features of today's labour relationships. Their use encourages employees to stay with the company, plan their careers and work: "It becomes their work hygiene (V 10)."

However, flexibility alone is not enough for an employee to feel safe and for the company to seem attractive to work at. Relationships in the team, communication, respect for the employee creates an atmosphere of a safe working environment. Research shows that the corporate culture affects the choice of employees, especially men, to take parental leave and become more actively involved in raising a child.5 One company representative shared that the family-friendly work culture they were introducing encouraged men to share parenting examples: "I felt very awkward to say that I am a single father raising a young child, because it seemed that being a single dad with a child was something unusual... One would think: how am I going to cope with my duties? But I come here and everyone talks about children as if it was a normal phenomenon. <...> After 3 months, I confessed to my manager that I am a single father, and after another 3 months I told my team too." The person felt comfortable enough, and we said: "Ok, this means the initiatives are visible, we only need to reinforce them somehow so that one doesn't have to wait for 6 months to open up to the team that they are mom or dad." (V 3).

Incentives for the promotion and career opportunities despite the established stereotypes about gender roles. Around half of the respondents commented that building an inclusive culture in the workplace, with critical reflection on gender role stereotypes and open support for family diversity, has an impact on employees' personal choices. For example, discussions are organised in employee teams to change attitudes that motherhood/fatherhood should not become a barrier for career development. Another company shared examples of efforts to promote parental roles that do not fit into traditional gender roles: they organise discussion forums, women share their experiences of how they have pursued a career in traditionally male-dominated sectors, and men share their experiences of parenthood and childcare (V_2). For LGBT+ employees, employers offer similar measures to those granted by the state to heterosexual families: We offer them the same paternal or parental leaves. We do not have many examples, but we have successful ones which we are very delighted with." (V_4).

Benefits to the **Employer** / Company

LOYALTY AND LOW STAFF ROTATION

Almost all representatives of the companies surveyed reported a positive impact on the employer. The application of family and work reconciliation measures is related to employees feeling comfortable, confident and able to plan their work and personal life. Staff rotation is lower in such companies. Employers observe that employees do not abuse the possibility of full flexibility: "People are very responsible and they don't really abuse it, they only take advantage of it when really necessary." (V_8). This practice develops when the employer understands that the prosperity of the company depends on employees' contribution. This is why a humane attitude towards the employee is essential: "They are my colleagues; they are the most important people and they must be respected and valued." (V_8). The respondents emphasised that "When we started the measures, we saw an increase in the percentage of employees who took parental leave and returned after it." (V_10).

A proactive role of the manager in communicating with an employee on parental leave increases the likelihood that the employee will return to the company instead of changing the employer. It was observed in the company that if managers did not keep in touch, did not communicate regularly, and did not ask when the employee would return from parental leave, there was an increase in the number of employees leaving the company (V_10).

INCREASED EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ATTRACT TALENT

The less stress a person is under from how they can reconcile work and home duties, the lesser the tension, the lesser the emotional fatigue or the chances of stress, the bigger the resilience to stress, the lesser chances of burnout, the higher the efficiency. (V_1) Employees are interested in workplace values, organisational culture, inclusion and equal opportunities: in order to attract talent and good employees, employers must strive to foster a work culture based on respect. (V_2).

CONCLUSIONS

- ► The most proven means of family and work reconciliation are flexibility and hybrid working. Such type of work organisation makes it easier for employees returning from parental leave to integrate into the workplace, promotes a sense of security and allows them to take care of a young child during working hours, if necessary. Flexible and hybrid working arrangements reinforce employees' sense of responsibility and make them less likely to look for another job.
- ► Some employers offer additional measures: children's spaces, organisation of children's employment or reimbursement of these services, lump sum payments, supplementary health insurance and/or days off. The use of these measures, which are not provided for in the Labour Code, demonstrates the employer's intention to make an additional investment in the well-being of their employees and improves the employer's image.
- ► To better understand employees' needs, employers organise surveys and focus groups, support employees' informal interest groups inside the companies (e.g. parents' and guardians' groups), and cooperate with social

partners (works councils, trade unions). These methods provide employers with feedback on the effectiveness of family and work reconciliation measures implemented in companies, identify gaps that cause tension and anxiety for employees with family responsibilities and help them improve company policies in line with employees' needs.

- ► Various communication methods used by companies, such as memos for employees and managers, inform them about the steps to take when expecting a child and while on parental leave. Maintaining communication with employees, newsletters, informal events allow employees to feel part of the team and to stay informed about company processes.
- ► Effectiveness of family and work reconciliation measures to a large extent depends on the attitude and support of managers, proactive engagement and cooperation with team members. This is why companies invest in improving managers' managerial, communication and other skills. To maintain the balance between career and family commitments, companies provide opportunities for employees to learn and seek advice with career professionals or mentors. To improve employee well-being, reduce stress and achieve balance, companies offer additional support measures for both employees and their families.
- Companies develop inclusive, secure and family-friendly organisational cultures, where companies proactively take measures to achieve work-life balance and where this is supported by managers and supervisors and communicated about regularly. These practices enable the company to attract and retain professionals, improve performance and employer image.

We thank the teams of DSP Plus UAB, Telia Lietuva AB, Ignitis Group AB, Public Enterprise MO Museum, Philip Morris Lietuva UAB, Tele2 UAB, Euromonitor International - Eastern Europe UAB, Aconitum UAB, Danske Bank AS Lithuania Branch, Swedbank AB for agreeing to participate in the study and share the best practices of family and work reconciliation.

⁵ Workplace Support for Caring Masculinities. Transnational Analysis of Studies in Organisations.

https://www.men-in-care.eu/fileadmin/WWP_Network/redakteure/Projects/MiC/MiC_org_transnational_report_april_2022.pdf