Family and work
– it pays off!

FAMILY & WORK

It pays off!

Family and work – it pays off!
– development of
the polish online platform

Practical guide

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I. Work-life balance mechanisms

Support for the work-life balance of men and women remains one of the main priorities specified in the European Union Programme documents, e.g. in the *Gender Action Plan 2016-2020*. Making use of the work-life balance mechanisms (WLBMs) remains one of the greatest challenges not only in Poland, but also in many other EU Member States, especially in the so-called new Member States, which joined the Community in 2004.

WHAT ARE THE WLBMs?
These are mechanisms that favour the reconciliation of professional and personal roles for women and men, including legal and institutional arrangements offered by the state (e.g. paid leave for working parents, crèches, kindergartens, various forms of support in the labour market), as well as solutions that are the responsibility of entrepreneurs (e.g. systems of work organisation, additional benefits and various forms of financing the non-professional needs of employees). The work-life balance mechanisms support not only the employees who are parents, but also those who are taking care of their dependents, younger workers and older employees. In an aging society, there is a growing need to provide care for older / disabled family members. Also younger generations are increasingly articulating their needs for reconciling work with their hobbies.

WHY ARE THE WLBMs IMPORTANT?
Studies show that work-life balance is one of the conditions for maintaining health, wellbeing and satisfaction with life and work. In turn, the imbalance between these spheres can lead to excessive stress, workaholism, health deterioration, work and family conflicts and a decrease in self-esteem. Research shows that an abnormal work-life balance increases the risk of professional burnout by 12 times and the risk of depression by 3 times. It is the work-life balance mechanisms that respond to the challenge of reconciling professional activity with the private life.

BENEFITS OF INTRODUCING WLBMs
Employers are often of the opinion that maintaining the balance between professional and private life is the sole responsibility of the employee. However, the experience of companies clearly shows that investing in a culture that encourages work-life balance translates into employee engagement, and remains an important tool for attracting and retaining employees, and has an indirect impact on company's profits as well.

Long-term feeling of imbalance between work and private life also affects the quality of work performed. An overworked employee experiences difficulties in completing his work, remains less engaged, less motivated to work, enters into conflicts with colleagues and clients, becomes sick more often with all this resulting in increased sickness absenteeism. Ultimately, he/she usually decide to change employment, thus causing the company not only to lose valuable team member, but also to bear the costs of recruiting a new employee.

Specific benefits for employers from introducing WLBMs include without limitation:
• reduction of the cost of sick leave and delays,
• reduced staff turnover (lower recruitment costs),
• ability to maintain and acquire valuable employees,
• improvement of the image of the employers,
• greater loyalty and employees engagement, which has a significant impact on the productivity and innovation of businesses.

# II. Project „Rodzina i praca – to się opłaca!" (Family and work - It pays off!)

The Ministry of the Family, Labour and Social Policy has recognized the need to "translate" the work-life balance mechanisms into a practical language that is both accessible to employers and employees. This is to demonstrate what solutions are appropriate for employers of all sizes, profiles and forms of business as they are introduced, what costs may be associated therewith and, finally, what benefits may result from the introduction of such solutions. Research and analyses show that one of the main reasons for the lack of widespread application of work-life balance mechanisms in Poland is the low level of awareness both among the employers and the employees.

The Ministry's past experience has shown that tools in the form of comprehensive, practical and intuitive web-based platforms are readily used by citizens. Therefore, it was decided to prepare a new web site devoted entirely to the topic of the WLBMs which would present this contentin a transparent, exhaustive and attractive way.

Creating a platform required several steps - interrelated and coherent. For their smooth implementation, the project "Family and work - It pays off!" was developed and its realization proved to be an important element of the coherent policy of the Polish government in creating a climate conducive to the family.

The project assumed three main objectives:
• develop a comprehensive and practical tool for employers and employees to facilitate the implementation of WLBMs - an online platform,
• raise the level of knowledge of employees and employers through the use of WLBMs in enterprises,
• as a consequence, increase the number of enterprises using WLBMs.

WORK   LIFE
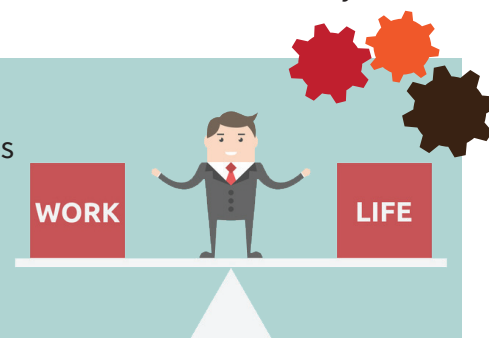
As the project has been positively evaluated by the European Commission, the Ministry of the Family, Labour and Social Policy has received European Union funds under the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020). The total project budget is approximately €194,000. The duration of the project is 17 months.

III. What is the platform?

Addressees of the platform:
- Employers
- Employees
- Consulting/advisory companies
- Labour market experts
- Academic circles

The Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy assumed that the platform would effectively convince consumers of the benefits of WLBMs when its recipients find practical examples and situations and circumstances close to their own.

Employers would be able to review information on flexible working hours implemented in a similar company (of comparable size, business profile and operating in a similar sector). The employer / business owner will also pay attention to reliable costing, a description of any problems and difficulties they might expect, and the real benefits of implementing the solution.

Also employees need a variety of solutions - depending on the nature of their work, life stage, age, family situation. It is therefore worth preparing profiled information for all those groups.

The main benefits of the platform in shaping friendly and good trends in the economy and within the society:

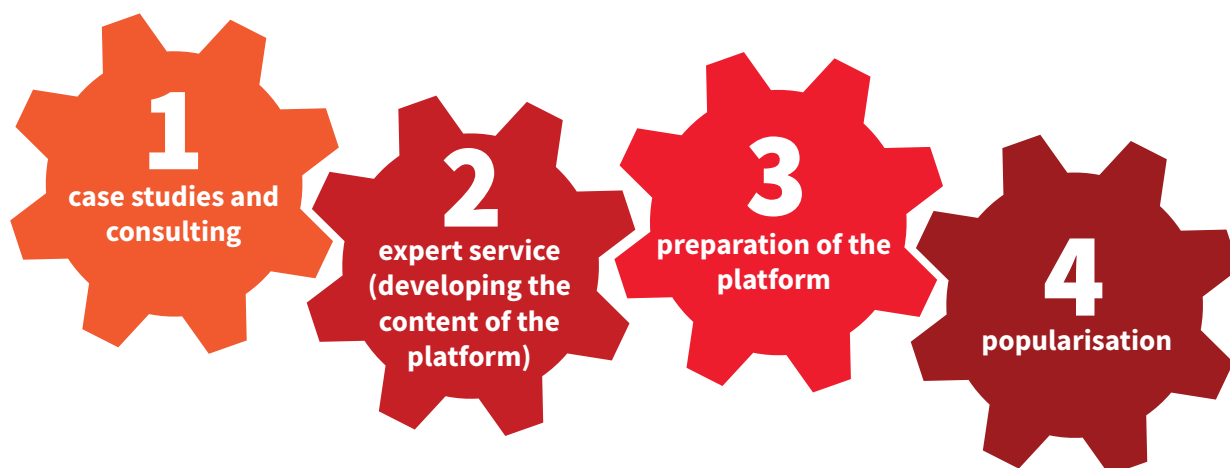|			
Promoting the idea of a balance between work and private life	Make employees aware of their rights	Pointing the path - implementing work-life balance mechanisms step-by-step	Promotion of the participatory approach to WLBM implementation
Presenting tools and solutions that support the reconciliation of work and family life	Dissemination of knowledge about the laws protecting and supporting the work-life balance	Promotion of good employer practices	Presentation of the research and consultancy experience gathered during the project	Inspiring employers to seek their own solutions

Such a concept of content and functionality of the platform has led to the need to investigate whether and how mechanisms to reconcile professional and family roles operate in enterprises.

The case studies conducted in companies with different profiles of activity, size and from different sectors, where the process of implementing the WLBMs is in the most optimal shape, were the starting point for the work on the platform. With the support of professional consultants, each of these processes was complex (analysing individual business situations, proposing possible solutions and implementing mechanisms), and allowed them to choose the best solutions to meet the needs and specificities of each selected company.

Such a scheme of action has enabled information to be supplemented by conclusions from existing studies and analyses, and thereby enabled the development of comprehensive, practical and tailored content for employers and workers to be placed on the platform. The process of consultation with all stakeholders and practical testing of the platform allowed for the optimisation of this tool in terms of form, content and target groups.

IV. Project - subsequent steps for implementation

1 case studies and consulting

2 expert service (developing the content of the platform)

3 preparation of the platform

4 popularisation

V. Case studies and consulting in companies

The methodological assumptions and subsequent stages of research and consultancy work on WLBMs in enterprises have been carefully thought out and planned - with a view to the purpose of those actions - i.e. if and how the work-life balance mechanisms are in fact functioning in Polish enterprises? how should they be implemented? what are the conditions for WLBM functioning? This stage was carried out by a contractor selected in a competition procedure. The contractor provided appropriately qualified researchers and experts, and was also responsible for recruiting companies to participate in the project. Members of the research team and experts have had to demonstrate their experience in large-scale projects in the fields of human resources research, analysis and strategies, equal opportunities in the labour market and diversity in the workplace.

1) Recruiting - which companies were covered by the study?

"Case study" analysis was supposed to reflect the state of WLBMs in Polish companies. Due to the limited time and budget resources, a total of 36 companies were analysed.

In order to ensure the representativeness of the companies participating in the study, their selection was based on the following criteria:

- size of enterprise (by number of employees): micro-, small-, medium- and large-size companies,
- business sectors and industry (in line with the core type of business),
- geographic factors (according to the address of the company's head office),
- the degree of WLBM implementation (companies that have implemented and used WLBMs and those that do not have any WLBMs implemented).

Precise selection of recruitment criteria has ensured the representativeness of the research and helped to accommodate for the diverse needs, expectations and opportunities.

2) Analysis of the situation found in the companies in terms of WLBM application

The next step was to see how WLBMs function in the companies covered by the study.

The analysis of the situation in a given company consisted of:

- analysis of documents and information made available by the company,
- standardised and non-standardised interviews - consultants interviewed with employees / employers / HR representatives - thus identifying the starting situation in the enterprise, WLBM needs and expectations, and the possible functioning of already implemented WLBMs,
- interviews with company owners, the management and employees to provide information on the practical aspects of existing WLBM solutions and to identify the most important WLBM-related challenges today,
- online-portal analyses - in particular recruitment advertisements published by a given company - proved often a valuable source of knowledge about what an entrepreneur sees as an asset that attracts potential employees,
- survey – it allowed access to sensitive data and delicate issues that emerged thanks to the anonymity of the study,
- enterprise workshops for decision makers or persons responsible for shaping the WLBM policy,
- observation - researchers were able to see various aspects of WLBMs functioning in the company.

The analysis stage allowed key challenges to be identified in the given enterprise. For each of them, individual recommendations regarding potential legal and organisational solutions have been developed that matched the challenges identified in the given company (e.g. policies, programmes, plans, regulations, specific WLB instruments, training / workshop proposals).

3) Developing WLBM recommendations for companies

For each of the surveyed companies, individual recommendations have been worked out using the **benchmarking method**, i.e. learning and creative adaptation of best solutions. It was based on the comparison of practices used in the surveyed enterprises with the solutions implemented in the companies recognised as leading in the subject of WLBMs. The method identifies the factors that make the WLBM processes effective and efficient and then points out the possibility of using similar activities/solutions in the enterprise under investigation. Benchmark analysis also included the differences between the benchmark and the researched company, for example: the way of the practice implementation, tools and methods used, number of employees involved in the practice, cost of application, extent to which the target was met.

Benchmarking covers the following steps:

- selection of WLBM practices, which were subjected to comparison procedures,
- development of an analysis plan and selection of data collection methods,
- identification of companies that were benchmarks,
- data collection,
- data comparison and analysis,
- preparation of recommendations resulting from comparative analysis and development of a recommendation implementation plan,
- implementation of changes.

Comparable benchmarks have been selected for benchmark analyses with regard to the companies that meet the following three criteria:

- they have implemented efficient and effective WLBM practices,
- the described practices are used in Poland,
- they belong to the same size class of companies as the surveyed company (i.e. large-, medium-, small- and micro-size companies).

4) Consultancy in the area of WLBM application in companies

WLBM consultancy was the key element of the study, remaining a prerequisite for its effectiveness and achievement of all goals. The intention behind the consultancy was to give information on the results of case studies and recommendations developed in this regard to the managers and decision-makers in the field of WLBM policy formulation in enterprises. The effectiveness of this action was dependent on the quality of the team of consultants and the company on the choice of optimal mechanisms for implementing recommendations tailored to the needs and capabilities of the given enterprise.

This stage was accomplished by provided each of the surveyed companies with:
- conclusions from the analysis of the situation in the enterprise in terms of applying WLBMs,
- information on identified challenges and needs within the scope of WLBMs,
- information about the research team's recommendations and solutions that address the company's challenges,

- implementation plan and timetable for WLBM activities in the enterprise,
- cost calculation (economic and non-economic) and anticipated benefits of implementing recommended solutions.

Consultancy was provided using the following tools:

• knowledge base - additional materials created during the study, e.g. a glossary of terms related to WLBMs, catalogue of good practices, advice on WLBM implementation,
• recommendation implementation scenarios - tailored to the needs of the given company,
• handbook of good practices - containing in particular the descriptions of WLBM practices in companies, adopted as benchmarks,
• training - in particular for those responsible for implementing WLBMs in the company, conducted by a team of consultants,
• consultancy - provided by a team of consultants.

5) Implementation of WLBM solutions in enterprises

Companies that have decided to implement the recommended work-life balance mechanisms have benefited from the support of the research team. At this stage, researchers and experts worked closely with decision makers in the enterprise and consulted individual WLBMs with persons who would be directly concerned with the results of those solutions.

The expert team worked out the optimal methods of implementing WLBMs in the enterprise using, among others: SMART analysis, SWOT analysis, constraint analysis, scenario building and expert panel.

This process also included identification of the environment of the changes being introduced, i.e. potential consultations with employee organisations and staff representatives. Potential need to take into account the legislation, taxes, health and safety, and other issues has also been discussed.

Another activity involved the development of a *Timetable*, including the identification of the stages, labour intensity, cost estimates and the number of people needed to engage in each activity.

Upon completion of the works, enterprise decision makers or persons responsible for shaping the WLBM policies received materials in the form of a personalised report with recommendations on the methods for implementing the jointly developed WLBM tools.

6) Supervision of WLBM implementation in companies

Several months after the end of the study, the research team returned to the companies asking what had been accomplished within the assumed plan: which WLBM was in fact implemented, which solutions proved to be impossible to be accomplished and why. Supervision data provided valuable information on the barriers and additional constraints involved in WLBM implementation.

7) Preparation of unique reports for each of the companies covered by the study

Studies and consultancy within enterprises were also supposed to provide empirical data that was the source material for the platform, providing an image of the WLBM situation in Polish companies. Therefore, upon completion of the study in each company, the research team developed a detailed report on the situation, consultancy and results in each of the companies studied.

This has resulted in 36 reports containing e.g.:

• description of the company - in particular taking into account enterprise size, sector, region,
• description of the situation at the enterprise in terms of WLBMs,
• description of the challenges and needs for WLBMs in the company,
• recommendations and proposals for WLBM solutions developed by the research team,
• costs (economic and non-economic) and benefits of the implementation of the solutions
  recommended by the research team in the enterprise.

The reports provided interesting information on the functioning of WLBMs in enterprises both for the surveyed entities and for the project team. They allowed to determine how the solutions, which seemed optimal in theory, proved in actual conditions. They also included information on non-obvious, negative aspects of WLBM implementation, related to poor experience in their implementation within the companies. Due to the sensitivity of this information, a great number of the surveyed companies have not decided to publish their company's name in the reports. That is why only those reports where the company did not reserve its confidentiality have been placed on the platform in their entirety. Data from all reports has been used as a contribution to the preparation of content for the platform.

8) Preparation of a comprehensive report based on all sub-reports - summary of the research and consultancy on WLBMs in enterprises

The overall report is a summary of all the results and case studies that were identified at the stage of analysis of the state of affairs, WLBM consultancy and implementation in enterprises.
The report included primarily:
a) brief descriptions of the types of major challenges that were encountered in enterprises, initially
   classified according to the following criteria:
- legal challenges - e.g. concerning legal regulations, labour code and other specific provisions;
- psychological challenges - attitudes - e.g. lack of acceptance for flexible forms of work, gender
  discriminatory attitudes, etc.;
- organisational challenges - e.g. related to type of work, production process, organisation, working time;
- financial challenges - such as the cost of implementing individual solutions in different types
  of businesses;
- other types of challenges, according to individual results of the analysis of the situation in a given
  enterprise;
b) Presentation of barriers and optimal ways to use work-life balance mechanisms, including the
   approximate costs and economic and non-economic benefits associated with the introduction
   of such changes in the various types of enterprises (categories of enterprises in line with the criteria
   for sample selection);

c) Description of optimal solutions for each type of enterprise, taking into account the criteria
   for the selection of the test sample;
d) A collection of all recommendations developed in the study, grouped according to the adequacy
   for the following types of staff:
- parents of children aged 0-3 years,
- parents of children aged 3-7 years,
- parents of children aged 7-18 years,
- women coming back to work after childbirth,
- persons in pre-retirement age,
- caretakers of dependents,
- oldest employees,
- youngest employees.

VI. Developing the content of the platform by a team of experts

Individual company reports and an overall report provided an empirical base for the content that would be presented on the platform. They were to be the element that was intended to serve as a practical benchmark for the platform user. Nevertheless, it required additional aspects, systematisation, and - above all - presentation in a ready-to-use form and simple and accessible language for both the employee and the employer. The development of the concept and content of the platform was entrusted to a team of experts. The team was selected in a way so as to ensure that various aspects of the WLBM functional aspects are taken into account to include specific competences and experience of expert team members as part of their selection process. The team included, inter alia, labour market specialists, labour law, human resources management. The experts also needed to have appropriate knowledge of the organisational structure of companies, as well as of business processes. Also an editor was included in the team - responsible for presenting the content in a clear, simple and accessible manner - a key element in the preparation of content presented on the Internet.

The team developed the most important functionality of the platform - **the WLBM tool search engine**. It is a very practical tool that allows the users to view the best WLBM tools tailored to their needs and capabilities based on the four criteria: company size, assumed costs of implementation, characteristics of the target group of employees and the nature of their work. Naturally, the results of research and business consulting provided the main source of search engine data.

The information on the platform was intended to be complete and useful for those considering the implementation or use of the WLBMs. That is why each and every of the 60 instruments was described in the following manner:

- What is it? - an explanation, in an accessible way, what the solution is, whether or not it results from a legal obligation or remains an example of good practices,
- The main beneficiary - in addition to the group selected in the search engine, it may also be targeted at other groups of employees,
- Benefits for employers/employees - listing the benefits of such an arrangement for both the employee and the employer - it may serve as an argument to convince the company's management of the need for implementing the given solution,
- The nature of business activity including possible limitations - an indication of the nature of the line of work, where the given solution may be applied and the possible limitations associated therewith,
- Costs - specification of potential / approximate costs of the solution - where it may be determined, a specific amount is provided and - if impossible - provide the type of costs that need to be taken into account,
- Risks - a brief overview of the conditions that an entrepreneur should consider when deciding to implement an WLBM,
- Recommendations - short tips on how to successfully implement the WLBM tool,
- Legal conditions - referring to labour law provisions, complete with a brief and easy explanation,
- See also - presentation of good practices, other tools, articles and materials related to the given solution.
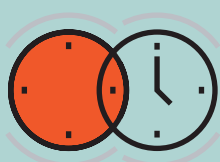
In addition to the WLBM tools search engine, two additional sections have been added to the platform: "For Employers" and "For Employees". The contents of various aspects of the WLBM functions were gathered and presented - good practices, legal clarifications as well as tips in the form of short and attractive articles prepared by the team of experts.

There is also a section on good corporate WLBM practices - a good source of inspiration for employers and employees who want to take on a good course for the "family and work" and to introduce mechanisms in their businesses to encourage good work-life balance. For those interested in deepening the subject, there is also an overview of available research and publications on WLBMs.

The main goal of the panel of experts was to prepare concise, clear, attractive content and tailor it to different audiences, including those not familiar with the WLBMs.

To this end, experts (including psychologists) prepared a special test entitled **Check your work-life balance**. The test is lightweight and easy to use, helping to analyse information on:

• stress management,
• organisation of personal work,
• assertiveness,
• teamwork / company work organisation system,
• work hygiene.
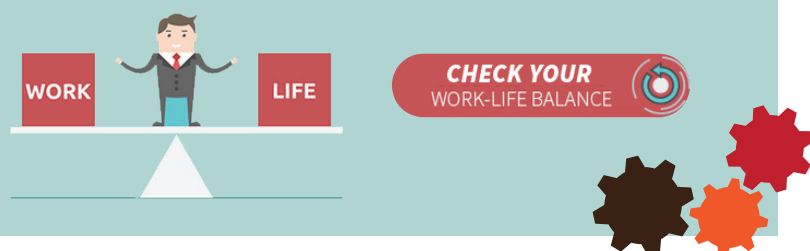
Answers to the questions included in the test will allow all audiences to preliminary identify the degree of the balance between their actual lives and work and to assess the workplace in this respect.

VII. Technical preparation of the platform

The team of experts preparing the contents of the platform also developed a specification of its appearance and function - the so-called page layout, because it is the experts developing the materials on the platform who know best which page layout will be most appropriate for presenting the materials and issues in question. The task of the subsequent contractor - an IT company - was to translate the concept of the platform into an actual virtual tool and ensure its safe and efficient operation.

In addition, the content presented on the platform was supplemented with infographics - graphically consistent and attractive highlighting of the most important WLBM issues.

An important step in IT preparations was also the thorough testing of its functionality. For this purpose, a survey was conducted by means of an on-line questionnaire survey among representatives of the companies involved in the research and advisory phase. They were also the first users of the platform - their comments were very valuable and allowed form and content of the platform to be better prepared and some of its functionality to be modified.

VIII. Dissemination of information regarding the platform

The finished platform will fulfil its functions only if it reaches its direct recipients. Engaging the social partners as intermediaries in the dissemination of the information on the platform remained extremely important for reaching as many employers and employees as possible. As a result, dissemination activities shall include information meetings dedicated to specific groups of organisations (employer organisations, employees, NGOs, HR representatives, labour market experts, academics, training and consultancy companies). The purpose of the meetings was to instil an interest in the WLBMs among the representatives of the various groups of social partners, so that they are able to pass on their knowledge further to their audience through popularising the platform. Participants received specially prepared messages containing basic ready–to–forward information about the platform and the project. The level of interest and involvement of employer and employee organisations, i.e. the main beneficiaries of the project, was of particular importance at this stage.

Summary

Wider use of outcomes and project results can become a very useful solution in other countries where efforts are made to persuade employers and employees to use WLBMs.

Obviously, various solutions and laws apply in each Member State. It seems, however, that the concept of developing a practical and comprehensive tool - such as an online platform - for employers and employees will provide access to a universal solution that should also prove effective in other countries. This is a prerequisite to include all required WLBM information on the platform and provide content that will allow you to easily search for WLB mechanisms tailored to your needs (based on search criteria like company size, sector, cost level, etc.).

Taking also into account the changing legal environment, it is our assumption that the content of the platform shall be updated on a continuous basis (particularly with regards to the law) to make it useful in the long run.