



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting in the ESIF and national budgets

Slovakia, 4-5 February 2020


Discussion paper –
Czech Republic



Ein Unternehmen der ÖSB Gruppe.

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This publication is supported by the European Union Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

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Gender equality in the ESIF in the Czech Republic

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1. Description of the main elements of the policy

1.1 Background and related policy context of the Czech Republic

The Partnership Agreement for the 2014-2020 Programming Period is a strategic document that defines “objectives and priorities for efficient use of the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) in order to achieve the Europe 2020 Strategy on the basis of defined national priorities.”¹ Despite the fact that *the Agreement* elaborates on several priorities where gender equality could be accentuated, the document mentions the topic only in the “competitiveness of the economy” priority, or more precisely in the “functioning labour market” sub-priority. This document identifies the main issues in this area as consisting in the difficulty to achieve work-life balance and the unequal position of women in the labour market, while suggesting following thematic objective (under thematic objective/TO8):

- Better conditions for reconciling private and professional life, and equality of women in the labour market. With the major results being:
 - Increased offer of affordable, quality facilities for pre-school childcare, especially for children under 3 years of age.
 - Increased participation of men in childcare and care for other dependent persons.
 - Increased offer and use of flexible forms of work.
 - Increased number of employers practicing the principles of equal opportunities for women and men in employment.

These four results are then assigned to the Operational Programme Employment (OP E), namely to the investment priority 1.2. “Equality between men and women in all areas, including in access to employment, career progression, reconciliation of work

¹ Partnership Agreement for the Programming Period 2014-2020, Ministry of Regional Development, Czech Republic. [Accessed 10 December 2019]. Available at: <https://www.dotaceeu.cz/getmedia/4589b39c-4215-4f0b-914d-b296678db1c8/Partnership-agreement-technical-revision-approved-by-the-EC-on-13-April-2016.pdf?ext=.pdf>

and private life, and promotion of equal pay for equal work.” The Programme is managed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MoLSA). While the allocation of Operational Programme Employment amounted to 64.3 billion CZK (2.52 billion EUR) as of September 2019, the expenditures directed to the investment priority 1.2. totalled 5.7 billion CZK (223 million EUR).

1.2 The goals and target groups of the policy

Since *the Partnership Agreement*, as well as the following OP E, focus exclusively on the promotion of gender equality within the labour market, the policy is targeting issues connected to low employment of women and the gender pay gap. It concerns the parents of small children (mainly women), employers, and (proportionally less) the general public.

The economic potential of women in the Czech labour market is not being sufficiently harnessed. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs *Policy on Employment Strategy until 2020*,² the life event that most significantly impacts the employment of women in younger age groups is motherhood. The employment of women in the age group 20-49 with at least one child younger than 6 years is, despite slight progress, still far behind the EU’s average. With one of the longest parental leaves worldwide, Czech women’s status in the labour market is negatively affected by extensive absences, loss of competitiveness, the deepening of an already existing gender pay gap and further slowdown of professional growth. Among the basic obstacles of greater equality between women and men in the labour market is an insufficient work-life balance, namely a shortage of both locally and price-wise affordable childcare facilities (especially for children younger than 3 years), an inadequate offer of flexible forms of employment, and an insufficient number of employers actively practicing gender equal opportunities.

1.2.1 Increased offer of affordable, quality facilities for pre-school childcare

One of the biggest factors preventing greater gender equality in the labour market is the shortage of affordable facilities for pre-school children. Data from the Ministry of Education regarding pre-school applications in 2018/2019 suggest that every sixth child’s application (older than 3 years) was rejected due to limited capacities. And that is despite the fact that since 1 September 2018, all children over 3 years should have guaranteed access to pre-school. In Prague, the numbers are as high as 30% of rejected applicants (over 3yo), in the Central Bohemian Region the number is 22%, in the Zlín Region and South Moravia Region 17% of these applicants were turned down.³

² Strategie politiky zaměstnanosti do roku 2020. MPSV, 2014. [Accessed 10 December 2019].

Available at: <https://www.esfcr.cz/file/8988/>

³ Kapacity v mateřských školkách nestačí ani pro tříleté. Česká ženská lobby, 2019. [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: <https://czlobby.cz/cs/zpravy/tz-kapacity-v-materskych-skolkach-nestaci-ani-pro-trilete>

1.2.2 Increased participation of men in childcare and care for other dependent persons

Another important factor influencing gender inequality in the Czech Republic is the lack of a greater involvement of men in child (or other dependant) care. While in many European countries, fathers are actively taking over at least part of the parental leave, only 1.8 % of fathers in the Czech Republic drew on parental benefits.⁴ One of the main reasons for such a low figures is a strong presence of socio-cultural beliefs and traditional assumptions about the division of gender roles. Subsequently, the current parental leave system makes it economically disadvantageous for the person with the higher salary in the couple to draw on parental benefits. Since in many families, it is often men who make more money than their female partners, wage inequalities are being further reinforced by the system.

In 2018, the Czech Republic introduced a week-long paternity leave as an attempt to send a signal that fathers should be involved in childcare early on. And while around 43.000 fathers (40-45%) applied for the allowance in 2018,⁵ the one week leave presents more of a short post-natal break rather than a substantial shift in the gendered division of care.

1.2.3 Increased offer and use of flexible forms of work

According to the Czech Statistical Office, the portion of flexible and part-time work is among the lowest in the Czech Republic, it stays around 7%. In neighbouring Austria and Germany, there are almost 30% of employees who are using these types of working arrangements. Given the fact that in the Czech Republic, women are mostly taking care of smaller children (within but also after the end of parental leave), the lack of available flexible working conditions is making it increasingly difficult for them to manage their personal and professional life and economic independency. From around 380.000 part-time jobs in the Czech Republic, more than 70% were occupied by women between 30 and 44 years old.⁶

The policy context in the Czech Republic (mainly the Labour Code) does not prevent the introduction of flexible and alternative work arrangements but at the same time, it does not actively promote them to be socially and economically desirable. The legal framework also does not recognize or tackle greater vulnerability and possible precarity of those working in flexible and part-time arrangements, which leads to fear on the side of potential flexible employees. At the same time, while working part time, the amount of remuneration (especially for women with small children) barely covers

⁴ *Fakta a zdroje k tématu předškolních zařízení pro děti od dvou let*, Česká ženská lobby, 2018. [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: <https://czlobby.cz/cs/zpravy/fakta-zdroje-k-tematu-predskolnich-zarizeni-pro-deti-od-dvou-let>

⁵ *National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2019*. Office of the Government, 2019 [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2019-european-semester-national-reform-programme-czech-republic_en.pdf

⁶ *Roste počet vysokoškoláček i podnikatelek*. Český statistický úřad, 2019. [Accessed December 2019]. Available at: <https://www.czso.cz/csu/czso/roste-pocet-vysokoskolacek-i-podnikatelek>

the price for commuting and childcare. On the side of the employers, flexible and part-time jobs come with greater administrative, organisational, and taxational burden (due to the lack of relieving legislature that would positively enhance the increase of this type of working arrangements).

1.2.4 Increased number of employers practicing the principles of equal opportunities for women and men in employment

The unequal position of women in the Czech labour market is also tightly connected to broader gender stereotypes in society, which leads to subsequent discrimination practices by employers. Vertical segregation of the Czech labour market is still very much prevalent as the access of women to decision-making and positions of power is ranked low both by EIGE's *Gender Equality Index 2019*⁷ and the *Global Gender Gap Report 2018*.⁸

The existing gender inequalities are also visible in the prevalent gender pay gap which remains more or less stable since 2008 and is one of the highest in the EU. While in 2017, the gender pay gap amounted to 4.500 CZK/176 EUR, the difference between average remuneration for men (31.909 CZK/1.252 EUR) and women (26.887 CZK/1.054 EUR) in the third quarter of 2019 climbed up to around 5.000 CZK/196 EUR, i.e. 19%.⁹ Lastly, the ongoing sectoral segregation, which leads women into less paying sectors and jobs, is also part of the problem. The underlying stereotypes regarding women's and men's so-called predispositions are being reinforced within the educational system and then transposed into the labour market.

One of the most staggering examples of sectoral gender segregation can be found within the information technology (IT) industry. Being identified as one of the key areas shaping the upcoming future of the economic and social aspects of our society by the *Global Gender Gap Report 2018*, women represent only 22 % of IT experts and workers in the industry.¹⁰ A similar trend can be found in the Czech Republic where 90 % of the IT workforce are men. Unsurprisingly, these figures are tightly connected

⁷ According the *Gender Equality Index 2019*, the Czech Republic's score in the domain of power (measuring gender equality in decision-making across the political, economic and social spheres) is 26.1. It is the lowest score for the country and the third lowest power score in the EU. See *Czechia, Gender Equality Index 2019* [Accessed 9 December 2019]. Available at:

<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2019/CZ>

⁸ According the *Global Gender Gap Report 2018*, the Czech Republic ranks 87 in both, the economic participation and opportunity, as well as in the political empowerment sub-index. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2018*. World Economic Forum, 2018. [Accessed 9 December 2019]. Available at

http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf

⁹ *Vývoj českého trhu práce – 3. čtvrtletí 2019*. Český statistický úřad, 2019. [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at:

https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/91606705/cpmz120419_analyza.pdf/76863333-da25-4539-9a02-5d281b2b6409?version=1.0

¹⁰ *The Global Gender Gap Report 2018*. World Economic Forum, 2018. [Accessed 9 December 2019]. Available at: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf

to the education system where 95 % of the IT alumni are men. As for the gender pay gap, Czech women in IT usually make 84% of their male colleagues' remuneration.¹¹

1.3 The legal provisions to implement the policy, institutional arrangements and procedures of implementation

The gender equality agenda, as mentioned in the background and related policy context section, is directed by *the Partnership Agreement* within ESI funds. Since it is being explicitly thematised only in the economic/labour market section (TO8), it is financed via the OP E with the MoLSA as the managing authority. The role of the National Coordination Authority (NCA) – which is responsible for the management and coordination of the implementation and fulfilment of the objectives, as well as for the monitoring and negotiating of terms for the upcoming period – is performed by the Ministry of Regional Development (MoRD).

One of the key aspects of the current programming period is an emphasis on greater connectivity of ESI funds with national strategies. The strategic document guiding the priorities in the gender equality agenda in the Czech Republic is *the Government strategy for equality of men and women in the Czech Republic for 2014-2020*.¹² The interconnection between *the Strategy* and ESI funds was materialised within calls for proposals (under the OP E) supporting the implementation of the *Strategy's* priorities. However, on a broader level, while *the Strategy* thematises more aspects of the gender equality agenda (including the necessity to work against persisting gender stereotypes in society), ESI funds focused predominantly on economic issues and the labour market.¹³

¹¹ *ICT odborníci v České republice*. Český statistický úřad, 2019. [Accessed 9 December 2019]. Available at: <https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/95632581/063009-18.pdf/0f4ba681-c6b3-4226-b81e-6634cac046fb?version=1.2>

¹² *Government strategy for equality of men and women in the Czech Republic for 2014-2020*, the Office of the Government of CR, 2014. [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/Projekt_Optimalizace/Government_Strategy_for-Gender_Equality_2014_2020.pdf

¹³ It is also important to note the funding coming from the Office of the Government towards gender equality is consistently shrinking, with the Office planning to devote as little as 2 million CZK (78.000 EUR) in 2020 to the gender equality agenda, half of what was distributed among the gender equality organizations in 2019.

2. Results of the policy and its impact on achieving gender equality

2.1 Key outcomes

2.1.1 Employment

The Czech Republic declared an objective to achieve the target rate of women employment of 65% by 2020 as part of *the Strategy Europe 2020* programme that is tightly connected to *the Partnership Agreement* and therefore to ESI funds. Drawing on the statistics from the third quarter of 2019, the unemployment rate in the Czech Republic is one of the lowest (2,2%) in the European Union, with rising economic activity being evident especially among women.¹⁴ The declared target has been reached in early 2018 with the employment of women climbing to 71.4%.¹⁵ However, this positive trend is a result of a favourable economic situation rather than pro-active measures implemented by the state. A workforce shortage in many sectors of the labour market led to a higher employability of those groups that are usually overlooked during more challenging economic times – namely women, older workers, people with lower education and so on. It is therefore important to systematically support the stronger position of women and other vulnerable groups in the labour market so that they have a more stable status in times of economic recession.

2.1.2 Childcare and greater involvement of men

The Czech Republic is trying to compensate for the shortage of pre-school facilities with the support of children groups funded through the European Structural and Investments Funds. Based on the information from *the Country Report Czech Republic 2019*, EU funds covered 850 children groups with a capacity of more than 11 000 children aged 1–6 years. Additionally, 276 places were created in so-called micro-nurseries for children from 6 months to 4 years and almost 5.000 places in children clubs. Taking into account all the financial resources allocated for the investment priority 1.2., the funds directed towards pre-school facilities amounted to 68% (3.9 billion CZK, 152.804.761 EUR). The portion of all the other thematic calls within this priority did not reach 10%. Still, it is estimated that 14.000 children younger than 3 years were not placed in childcare facilities due to limited capacities.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Vývoj českého trhu práce – 3. čtvrtletí 2019*. Český statistický úřad, 2019. [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/91606705/cpmz120419_analyza.pdf/76863333-da25-4539-9a02-5d281b2b6409?version=1.0

¹⁵ *Analýza vývoje zaměstnanosti a nezaměstnanosti v 1. pololetí 2018*. MPSV, 2018. [Accessed 10 December 2019]. Available at: https://portal.mpsv.cz/sz/politikazamest/trh_prace/rok2018p1/anal2018p1.pdf

¹⁶ *Country Report Czech Republic 2019*. Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011. [Accessed 8 December 2019].

The MoLSA also implemented the project *Support for the Implementation of Children's groups*, providing counselling and methodological support for childcare providers implementing the Children Group's Act. In line with the *Family Policy Strategy*, the overall goal is to continue improving the availability and quality of the services, including care service for the youngest children (micro-nurseries). Additionally, the ministry should come up with a system of national funding for these facilities.¹⁷

As for the greater involvement of men, there were two calls (16_061 and 16_062) where applicants could (among other topics) ask for the financial support of projects concerning men and their greater involvement in caring for their own children. However, as *the Strategic Evaluation of OP E* suggests, it is virtually impossible to assess the overall progress in this priority due to unclear connection between the target objectives of those calls and the result of the supported projects.¹⁸ In general, despite the fact that greater involvement of men remains one of the most crucial aspects of a better work-life balance for all, it has been a rather marginal topic within this funding period (and the insufficient indicators and evaluation mechanisms are a testament of this sentiment). The aforementioned (week-long) paternity leave, which is not a direct result of ESI fund but rather part of the broader state policy, is an important but rather symbolic step in the right direction.

2.1.3 Flexible work and gender-sensitive employers

The effort to increase the number of gender-sensitive employers practicing an equal approach to men and women¹⁹ has been accentuated mainly in the calls for gender audits (16_050 and 16_051) and the implementation of their results (17_130 and 17_131). Overall, there were 26 applicants coordinating gender audits (total allocation 25 million CZL/980.046 EUR) and 75 applicants implementing the audits' results (33 million CZK/1.293.791 EUR).²⁰ Both of the calls were designed and executed in line with the *Standard of Gender Audit*, published by the Office of the Government of CR in 2015 in cooperation with the gender experts from the nongovernmental (NGO) sector.²¹

¹⁷ *National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2019*. Office of the Government, 2019 [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2019-european-semester-national-reform-programme-czech-republic_en.pdf

¹⁸ *Strategická evaluace OPZ II, Hodnocení specifických cílů OPZ 2014 – 2018*. MPSV, 2019. [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: <https://www.esfcr.cz/documents/21802/11509210/Strategick%C3%A1+evaluace+OPZ+II.pdf/fd9b6944-1334-474f-a612-4fea7141311a?t=1563979103724>

¹⁹ The goal to increase the number of gender-sensitive employers practicing an equal approach to men and women is very broadly (vaguely) defined and may encompass variety of activities from promotion of non-discriminatory approach to male and female employees, introducing work-life balance set up, reducing gender pay gap or providing gender sensitive mentoring for their staff.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ *Standard of Gender Audit*. The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic. [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: https://www.vlada.cz/assets/ppov/rovne-prilezitosti-zen-a-muzu/Projekt_Optimalizace/Gender-Audit-Standards_V2_March2016_2.pdf

As for the flexible forms of work arrangements, a specific indicator has been set (70 more employers offering flexible work within 2014-2020). However, despite the fact that the indicator was exceeded (381 employers were offering flexible work by March 2019), the MoLSA states in the programme's evaluation that these results are not really indicative. The reason being that large portion of the indicator (299) amounts to children's groups where – since the parents were allowed to come back to the labour market thanks to their children's participation in the childcare facility – the parents' employers were supported (the system claims) in a secondary manner (and were counted into the indicator) as well.²² This, however, does not reflect the extent to which the offer of new flexible work arrangements expanded. One of the large scale projects concerning gender pay gap and promoting more equal working condition is a five year long systematic project *22% TO EQUALITY* implemented by MoLSA.

2.2 Challenges, obstacles and constraints encountered

The Czech Women's Lobby (CWL) is currently implementing the project "Reflection of the impact of ESIF programmes on the equality of men and women in the labour market" with the support of the Cohesion Fund through the Operational Programme Technical Assistance.²³ The general aim of the project (2018-2021) is to evaluate the results and goals of *the Partnership Agreement* in the field of gender equality in the programming period 2014–2020. With the project being (as of late 2019) in its 8th phase, the research team already conducted the analysis of relevant documents and interviews with the managing authority's experts, the projects' implementers (from the NGO sector), and selected target groups. In addition, the team focused on selected project case studies and on the evaluation of gender equality as one of the horizontal principles in ESI funds. The following sections draw on that research. All the research reports have been shared with MoRD and MoLSA but have not been published, nor are they broadly accessible yet.

2.2.1 Low gender equality awareness and insufficient promotion of the agenda

Being able to challenge gender stereotypes and discriminatory assumptions, which are widely spread in Czech society, is one of the key requirements for an effective implementation of gender equality projects and the amplification of their results. Despite the fact that some of the calls were partially devoted to raising awareness about the gender equality agenda, it is important to acknowledge that enough

²² *Strategická evaluace OPZ II, Hodnocení specifických cílů OPZ 2014 – 2018*. MPSV, 2019. [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: <https://www.esfcr.cz/documents/21802/11509210/Strategick%C3%A1+evaluace+OPZ+II.pdf/fd9b6944-1334-474f-a612-4fea7141311a?t=156397910372>

²³ *Reflection of the impact of ESIF programs on the equality of men and women at labour market*, Czech Women's Lobby. [Accessed 8 December 2019]. Available at: <https://czlobby.cz/en/projects/reflection-impact-esif-programs-equality-men-and-women-labour-market>

attention has been paid to the promotion of the importance of this issue as well as of the specific tools implemented through ESI funds.

One can demonstrate this on the aforementioned example of gender audits. Many of the NGOs that executed gender audits testified that there is a low interest on the side of employers whose agreement to undergo the gender audit is essential for the project. The fact that the managing authority (MoLSA) as well as the government and state administration more broadly do not sufficiently promote and accentuate the importance of these tools (and the topic of gender-sensitivity among employers in general), which makes it difficult to execute these types of projects in the first place. With the NGO sector being one of the strongest (and sometimes sole) voices promoting the gender equality agenda, the impact of the projects is often not further amplified. The same logic goes for other types of interventions – be it children groups or a greater involvement of men. Rather than implying low interest on the side of the implementers or target groups, one needs to work on the continuous promotion of the agenda and offered tools/interventions (especially outside of big cities and towards groups facing other structural challenges such as low socio-economic status or an affiliation to ethnic or minority groups).

2.2.2 Expertise and limited capacities

Referring to the interviews with experts coming from both the managing authority as well as the applicants/NGO sector, one of the topics often accentuated in the research has been the issue of gender equality expertise. As many of the respondents from the NGO sector, who have been working in the field for nearly two decades, emphasised, the calls that are open not only to NGOs but also to businesses do not have elaborate mechanisms that would ensure the proper evaluation of the applicants' level of gender expertise. Subsequently, the level of gender expertise among the managing authority's staff does not always meet the standards either. For the upcoming period, the CWL's research therefore recommends ensuring more elaborate assessments of applicants' expertise, as well as to invest more resources to ensure a consistent level of expertise (and hence subsequent guidance and support) on the managing authority's side.

Another topic tightly connected to the issue of expertise is the question of capacities. A professional and effective NGO sector is an essential prerequisite of high-quality project implementation. There have been calls directed specifically towards the internal professionalization of NGOs, a practice valued highly by both experts in the field and the implementing organisations that had the opportunity to strengthen their expertise and capacities. However, to ensure greater sustainability of the sector, it is desirable that within each project there is a designated portion of resources (10%) that can be used for strengthening of the implementers' expert and/or technical capacities.

2.2.3 Data collection and impact assessment

Based on CWL's research, one of the significant challenges of the current ESI funds' system is the lack of attention and resources devoted to data collection and their accessibility, as well as an assessment of current trends. For every well-designed

project, there has to be prior assessment of the situation and the target groups' needs. Therefore, CWL's research together with other experts in the field suggest that for the upcoming period, there should be greater support directed to an effective collection and systematisation of data. We also recommend that there are calls for so-called pre-projects that will allow applicants to first conduct a field research/needs assessment and then use the data to design a responsive projects (the data collected from the pre-project would have to be made widely available for research institutions as well as for the state administration and other potential applicants).

Subsequently, there is the need for a more systematic and efficient impact assessment. As mentioned earlier in this discussion paper, it is virtually impossible to measure progress in achieving some of the target objectives and goals.

3. Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the policy

3.1 Thematic scope

The gender equality agenda is a multi-sectoral issue which pertains to several layers of society. The reduction of the agenda within ESI funds on the labour market (and economic issues in general) is partially understandable since the gender pay gap, insufficient work-life balance, and other issues are the most visible testaments of gender inequality in the Czech Republic. However, if the funding system does not work with other aspects, namely education, research, and innovation, social inclusion (esp. domestic and sexual violence), access to health care (esp. obstetrics and reproductive rights), and an gender-inclusive development and urban planning, the progress in the economic sector will not reach its full potential. At the same time, the lack of women in decision-making and on all levels of politics is also slowing down the overall progress.

3.2 Partnership approach

ESI funds represent a great way to enhance gender equality in the Czech Republic, an agenda that is often being questioned as relevant and support-worthy by critical voices (coming – in some cases – even from the political representation). It is important to continue to engage relevant gender equality experts and organisations working in the field when creating proposals but also when establishing priorities for the upcoming period. The lack of comprehensive mid- to long-term planning as well as insufficient levels of consequence and succession between the individual calls for proposals, makes it difficult for the NGO sector and other applicants to work systematically.

3.3 Effectiveness and sustainability

In closing, it is essential to focus more attention on the root causes of gender inequality rather than dealing solely with the results of these inequalities. Even though the significant support of children's groups is an important endeavour, a plan on how

to support these facilities within a national budget should be developed, while more financial resources from ESI funds should go into systematic and potentially more transformative fields such as gender-sensitive education (incl. educating the educators), a greater involvement of men in childcare (both childcare professionals and men caring for their own children), continuous work with employers, the support of more women in decision-making, and awareness-raising with an emphasis on gender mainstreaming practices (and a better implementation of gender as a horizontal principle in ESI funds). Lastly, there is a broader need for legislative changes that would further support the agenda such as changes in the parental leave system (that would support an earlier return to the labour market and a greater involvement of men in childcare), as well as tax and administrative relief making flexible working conditions easier and more favourable for employers.