

MODULE 5

PROFESSIONAL-FAMILY LIFE BALANCE



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2. Identification of the affected groups
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INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

In the professional-family life balance training module the reader will learn how to achieve a good work-life balance. The steps to reaching a better balance with work and family will also be explained

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Knowledge: You will understand the process of reconciling professional-family life for rural women, while taking into consideration the importance and benefits of the process.

Skills: You will develop skills that will help you to balance your professional and family life. In addition, you will develop skills on how to use time in a flexible way to achieve your personal development.

Competences:

You will improve competences which are linked to personal and professional development such as multitasking, effective time management and goal orientation.

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROFESSIONAL-FAMILY LIFE BALANCE

- Reconciliation can be understood as an effort to balance work, family and personal life towards greater satisfaction and efficiency in order to achieve harmony in life.
- Reconciliation therefore combines not only working at the family level but it also includes the aspect of personal interests, hobbies, needs, values and priorities.
- The criterion of personal satisfaction and balance of one's own life plays an important role in achieving a healthy professional-family life.
- Reconciliation is an active way of looking for possibilities and solutions, that will take you to crossroads and seemingly dead ends, sometimes through trial and error.
- The process is long-term and completely individual.
- It is important to realize that the solution you find in a given stage of life, may not be relevant after some time. So it's a constant process.



2. IDENTIFICATION OF THE AFFECTED GROUPS

Who is affected by reconciliation?

In other words, we can define reconciliation as the realization of the right to have a family and at the same time fulfil oneself in working life, while not forgetting about our personal life, interests and needs. Reconciliation therefore affects both parents on maternity or parental leave or returning to work, but may also affect other groups such as workers or grandparents.



3. IMPORTANCE OF BALANCED PROFESSIONAL-FAMILY LIFE

Why is it important to reconcile?

Concern for the balance of life is an important element on the way to achieving our goals, whether on a personal, corporate or social level.



4. BENEFITS OF A PROFESSIONAL-FAMILY LIFE BALANCE

4.1. Benefits of reconciliation for parents on maternity / parental leave

Many studies show that more and more women on maternity or parental leave would like to get involved in the field of work during this period. After a period of “intense” motherhood, many women realize that they lack “something” - they may feel dissatisfied, frustrated, personal stagnation, or detachment from the world around them.

The opportunity to work during maternity/parental leave and combine work, family and private life brings:

- Satisfaction, composure,
- Maintenance of a mental balance and mental health,
- “Self-leadership” - conscious management of life, priorities and values,
- Alleviation or elimination of certain stigma related to “full-time motherhood”,
- Maintaining professional competence and involvement makes for an easier return to work,
- Personal growth,
- Strengthening of self-confidence, preventing or removal of “internal barriers”,
- Maintaining partial financial independence and self-sufficiency.

4.2. Benefits of reconciliation for employees

As a woman with small children, returning to work is one of the most difficult stages of life in terms of time and psychological demands - finding a job or returning to the original one, proving (whether to myself or the employer) that I can do it, and at the same time providing child care, household duties and find time for your partner, friends and yourself. The support of the company, the employer and close loved ones is crucial.

The key benefits of harmonization support tools for employees are:

- Satisfaction and harmonization of work and family life,
- Provision of better long-term performance and strengthening of work motivation,
- Alleviation of psychological and time demands of reconciling work and family life
- The ability to constructively address periods of time imbalance (children's illnesses, family problems, etc.)
- Better stress management,
- Maintaining and developing the professional competence and competencies - increasing the "attractiveness" of the employee,
- Faster and easier return to work, easy adaptation,
- Possibility to work during maternity/parental leave,
- Healthier lifestyle.

4.3. Benefits of reconciliation for society

The benefits for a family-friendly society are in particular:

- Economic stability,
- Elimination of health problems caused by stress,
- Elimination of social problems,
- Support for family policy, elimination of divorce,
- Reduction of unemployment,
- Elimination of discrimination and stereotyping, societal stereotypes,
- Elimination of gender pay inequalities and unequal employment.

5. EXAMPLES OF MEASURES WHICH SUPPORT THE BALANCE OF FAMILY, WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE

- Flexible forms of work (flexible working hours, part-time work, shared jobs, uneven distribution of working hours, work from home)
- Personal and career development plans during maternity/parental leave
- Plans to return to work or reduce employment before planning to leave
- Paid leave for the father at the birth of a child or the admission of a child to foster care
- "Sick days" - paid days for recovery in case of short-term illness
- Opportunity to work for the local community, non-profit sector
- Capacity building in kindergartens, application of various forms of child care (mutual parental assistance, nanny, maternity and family centers, children's groups)
- Reconciliation projects supported by the EU through the Structural Funds (The European Social Fund, The European Regional Development Fund) and the state budget (more information on:

<http://www.coface-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/ERP-COFACE-ANNEXE.pdf>)

6. CHALLENGES AND GAPS IN ACHIEVING PROFESSIONAL-FAMILY LIFE

- The main challenge is to fight against gender stereotypes. This is linked to traditional attitudes that suggest that it is the primary responsibility of women to care for children and/or other dependants. The male breadwinner/female housekeeper models still seems to be the prevalent model in most European countries.
- European labour markets seem to be faced with high gender segregation and other work-related gender inequalities. There is also a gender

division of paid and unpaid labour predominantly, with women working significantly more hours than men if unpaid (household) work is taken into account. In numerous countries the regulations in place favour a sequential, rather than simultaneous, combination of employment and care obligations, particularly for women. The results are often long care-related leave periods and related employment breaks.

[More information about the European labour market can be found on p.11 of our Summary report.](#)



- If a mother returns to work from maternity leave it is often for part-time work for many years which has strong implications for career opportunities, lower incomes, a gender pension gap etc.
- A big challenge seems to be how to address and involve men in care and other unpaid work where effective and proactive strategies seem to be missing.
- On a policy level, there is also of the lack of awareness of the importance and benefits of supporting an adequate work-life balance.
- A further challenge is the involvement of stakeholders. Social partners might not place reconciliation measures on their agenda and sometimes, particularly trade unions, even seem to be rather suspicious of some measures.



7. WAYS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES

- Fighting against gender stereotypes (raise awareness, education, friendly policies, tax system)
- Combatting gender segregation in the labour market (after-school care facilities)
- Promoting the availability, affordability and quality of childcare facilities and services.
- Involving men in childcare and other unpaid work
- Increasing awareness and implementation of reconciliation matter at policy level (political commitment, legislation)
- Increasing the involvement of stakeholders (social partners, discuss reconciliation in different life stages)
- Change the prevalent working culture



8. HIGHLIGHTING THE DIFFERENCE IN THE SITUATION OF RURAL WOMEN

- Women's economic empowerment is a necessary step to promote women's rights and achieve gender equality.
 - Throughout the last few decades, women have been entering the labor market and, despite the still existing inequalities in terms of wages and opportunities, there are many sectors in which women have achieved great visibility. This is not the case in agriculture and livestock industries.
 - Currently, women working in rural areas must face a double burden, one linked to the fact of being a woman and one linked to the difficulties of life in the countryside. This is why it is essential to integrate the gender issues in the national and European agriculture policies.
 - Many women are working on the family farm, so even though they work as much as any other person, the legal status of their work is "family assistance", and therefore they do not have their own income. The solution, from our point of view, is to promote the shared ownership of the land.
- [For more detailed information please go to our Summary report to the section: Evolution of women and rural areas, Women and agriculture.](#)



8.1. Which are the biggest challenges that women living and working in rural areas face?

- Women in the rural world face many inequalities.
- Currently, about one third of the sector is occupied by women but the data indicates that women's farms are smaller, less profitable and have more difficulties accessing credit and innovation support.
- There is a significant inequality regarding the labor market in terms of access to paid employment and, therefore, many women need to choose self-employment, despite all the difficulties it entails.
- Starting up a business in rural areas is much more difficult than in a city, there are many deficiencies in public services, communication, technologies and access to financing.
- There is a large part of the rural world in financial exclusion, especially women.
- Regarding public services, there have been significant cuts in many countries, which have accentuated the already existing shortcomings in education, health, and transport. Yet another consequence for women.
- When the Government does not supply the basic services, the most it is often women that are the ones in charge of providing the care.



9. HOW DOES THE EUROPEAN UNION ADDRESS GENDER DISCRIMINATION WITHIN THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP)?

- The gap in the amount of aid received by women compared to male farm owners is around 36%.
- This difference is caused by the number and size of women's farms, which are fewer and smaller.
- This is why we suggest a CAP that addresses gender issues.
- There are no specific funds aimed at women on farms with the EU.
- Currently, the CAP offers the possibility to the Member States to distribute the funds taking into account the gender gap in opportunities, but no country has yet launched a specific program.
- Considering that the EU has recognised and published data on existing gender inequality in farms, it should integrate the gender issues into the CAP instead of letting each country decide whether to do so.



10. HOW TO ACHIEVE A PROFESSIONAL-FAMILY LIFE BALANCE

How to do it? What can help?/How to reconcile successfully

10.1. Consciously try to achieve balance

Divide your time consciously among all areas of life: work, family (children, partner), friends, but also about your personal development, interests, relaxation and questions of your motivation, values and priorities. Do not forget about rest and a healthy lifestyle.

10.2. Understand what is important to you

Knowing your own values is important both in your professional and in your family and personal life. Only those who are aware of their values can recognize and set their priorities in order to manage them. Ask yourself to these questions: What is important to me in life, what fulfills me? How do I really want to live? What is my current goal? What am I missing? If you find little or nothing in your life that is extremely important to you (whether at work or in your private life), set the immediate goal of reintegrating it into your life and work on it consciously. You are the most important criterion, your needs, wishes, your satisfaction, your wants or desires.



10.3. Gain strength

Only those who gain new strength can be active and effective in their lives. It is therefore important not only to be able to manage your energy expenditure but also your income. It is very important for our mental, emotional and physical health to balance periods of stress and calm. Take pleasure, reward yourself, find time for yourself, rest, relax. Try to integrate into your life as many activities as possible that strengthen you, bring a feeling of satisfaction and happiness. Don't save your life "for later", "when the children grow up", "when your parental duties end", "when you retire", live here and now.

10.4. Constantly work on yourself, build self-confidence

If you are on maternity or parental leave, consider this time as a time of your personal growth. You are constantly working on yourself, educate yourself, be active. Take this period into your own hands, invent new activities, get involved in projects, maintain professional contacts, engage in activities that you enjoy and have not had time to do before work, or participate in volunteer activities (maternity, family centers, non-profit organizations, politics, etc.). Do activities that are not related to your child. These kind of activities strengthen not only your work competencies but also your self-confidence.



10.5. Work constantly on the relationship and strengthen it

The relationship is the alpha and omega of our satisfaction. A partner is a person who is closest to you, you give each other strength through love and trust. Take time for this important person in your life. Reconciliation applies to both of you. The reason why relationships fail and often the process of reconciliation, is the fact that partners spend little valuable time together, forgetting about caring for the relationship and failing to invest in it. Therefore, you pay mutual attention to each other, surprise each other, talk about each other's needs, have common plans, consciously include activities that deviate from routine and everyday life. Consciously take responsibility for your relationship and continue to work on it.

10.6. You are not a superwoman, a superworker, or a supermother

To think that it is in your power to manage many roles and tasks at once, that you have to be everywhere and manage everything on my own, while "saving the world" and being nicely groomed and dressed and still in a great mood, is a misconception. Do not try to be a superwoman, superworker and supermother, the pursuit of perfection is dangerous, it does not benefit anyone, least of all you. Delegate, use the help of the family and friends, reject perfection, load as much as you can carry, and learn how to effectively manage and organize your time.



10.7. Delegate and use the help

Think about how you organize your time. Which tasks, responsibilities and activities can you transfer to someone/something else in order to save time for activities that are more important to you?

10.8. Reject perfectionism, perfection and high demands

Beware of perfectionism and perfection - they are subjective categories.

Chasing for perfection is dangerous, it can exhaust you so much that you will not enjoy the result at all or you will be disappointed with many small details that were not inline with your ideas. Likewise, being the “perfect full-time mother” does not necessarily mean being the best mother. The pursuit of perfect motherhood harms not only the mothers themselves but also their children. Today’s society is focused on performance and the bar is generally set very high, which is why our demands on ourselves, family, children and work are high. Use your time for what really matters.



10.9. Our roles and how to manage them

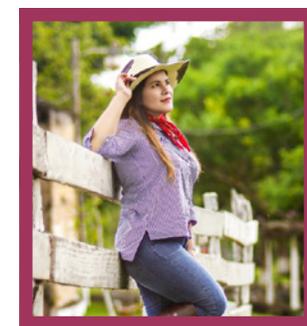
We do not have the power to play many roles and tasks at once. Studies show that most people are unable to perform more than seven roles at a time. The more we hold, the more difficult it is to combine these roles. Different roles have different characteristics, priorities, tasks, but above all our participation. Many activities at once dilutes our power and energy, then we feel that we cannot give 100% in any area. This causes a lost overview, omissions, time lost and often stress and dissatisfaction from one’s own activities as well as negative evaluations of the family and the surroundings. Therefore, estimate the limit of your meaningful workload, be realistic - load as much as you can really carry, learn to say “no”, realize

what is really important to you, and get rid of the roles and tasks that burden you. Listen to the signals of your body and surroundings, which is often a barometer of our “well-being”. Bet on your intuition as well - human intuition represents a kind of “emotional brain”. Although we make a number of decisions, we have a kind of “emotional brain”. So listen to your intuition and include it in your decision-making processes. Adequate confidence in your own feelings will make this decision easier and save you energy and time.



10.10. Practical tips

- Sort out your priorities
- Talk it out with your employers
- Learn the art of delegation
- Stay connected during the day
- Limit distractions and time-wasters
- Draw a line between home and work
- Make some time for yourself



Examples of reconciliation you can read in the case

studies from Slovenia – Tatjana Stancar, and Andreja Bizjak. In these case studies, women can find inspiration on how to organize work and at the same time be able to take care of children or fulfill themselves.

11. BARRIERS TO RECONCILIATION AND HOW TO PREVENT THEM

On the way to reconciliation, women may encounter a number of obstacles that make the situation more difficult. These include, in particular, stereotypical thinking, which can result in discriminatory behavior. It is necessary to change these stereotypes by pointing out that they exist, by finding suitable arguments to refute them, by mutual discussion, eliminate them by introducing suitable tools and find the courage to face them and “fight” against them, etc.

11.1. External barriers

- Prejudices of society – it is common that caring for children is seen as a woman’s job, a woman takes care of the household, a man acts as a breadwinner, women cannot hold certain professions.
- Absence or little support for pro-family policy measures.
- Insufficient capacity in pre-school facilities, lack or limited choice of other facilities for the care of young children.
- Lack of interest/little support from a parental partner.

11.2. Internal barriers

- Loss of self-confidence, low self-confidence - women are often limited and have to slow down in their careers. Low self-confidence results in them staying in the background of their actions, they do not apply for positions that they would certainly manage, they do not trust themselves, they ask for a lower starting salary, they do not think about higher progress and they do not value their successes enough.
- A negative attitude, mental setting - supported by negative stories from surroundings, generally bad situation, comparison - is related to our self-confidence and “tuning in”, positive thinking and self-perception.



11.3. How to get out of it?

- Gain a new perspective on yourself, your acquired skills, and the benefits of spending time at home for the next section of your life, including your career. This view reinforces the so-called concept of “parental competencies” - skills and abilities that a woman has acquired through childcare and family, which changes the social outlook on the period of intensive childcare.
- Participate in projects for reconciliation and educational events, get information, get involved in local politics, inquire about public events
- Strengthen your self-confidence and work on it constantly
- Work on your strengths, do what you enjoy, and be the best at it. Try to think positively and optimistically



CONCLUSIONS

1. Reconciliation can be understood as an effort to balance work, family and personal life towards greater satisfaction and efficiency.
2. Reconciliation therefore combines not only the working level with the family level but also includes the aspect of personal interests, hobbies, needs, values and priorities.
3. Reconciliation is an active way of looking for possibilities and solutions.
4. It is a long-term and completely individual process.
5. It is important to realize that, the solution that you will find in a given stage of life, may not be relevant for other time.



SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. We mentioned in the module what can help you to reconcile successfully. Which steps would help you in your case?
2. The situation of rural women is different. Women working and living in rural areas must face a double burden: one linked to the fact of being a woman and one linked to the difficulties of life in the countryside. How do you perceive the situation of rural women?
3. Even if the process of reconciliation is very individual, can you recommend any advice that would help in the process of reconciliation for other women?

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- Pictures in this module are from websites www.pixabay.com and www.pexels.com

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