



A set of adapted measures to improve the coordination of the professional and private life of people living in rural areas

TERA - Development of a Comprehensive Approach for Enhancing Work-Life Balance of Professional and Private Life in Rural Areas, Based on the Establishment of Multi-Stakeholder Regional Systems and Local Partnerships

Prepared by Gender Equality Research Institute (IPES) and Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences - Eastern Norway Research Institute (ENRI)

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- #4 culture, civil society, good governance, and fundamental rights and freedoms;
- #5 justice and home affairs.

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1. ABOUT THE SET OF ADAPTED MEASURES

The preparation of the Set of Adapted Measures was led by all the activities that have already been carried out, which fall under the Work Package Overview and analysis of the current state in the field of the role and position of men and women in rural areas, with an emphasis on the challenges of balancing professional and private life: analysis and review of the literature, research on the coordination of professional and private life in Slovenia and Norway and the analysis of multi-stakeholder meetings with decision-makers in both participating regions.

The work package and the Set of measures are in line with all the objectives of the TERA project and especially with the following expected results of the project:

- Improving the knowledge of men and women in rural areas about the issue of gender stereotypes, traditional gender roles, the challenges of balancing professional and private life, and the importance of gender equality;
- Increased awareness of local and national stakeholders and decision-makers about the issue of balancing professional and private life in rural areas;
- Empowerment of men and women from rural areas with measures to balance professional and private life;
- Strengthened role of advocacy organizations to improve the position of women in the countryside and thus the sustainable development of the countryside;
- Increased awareness of men living in rural areas about the harmfulness of traditional gender roles and about the importance of their active involvement in the challenges of balancing professional and private life;
- Increased awareness of the role and position of women and men in rural areas (including the state of gender equality in rural areas) among the general public.

The set of measures is adapted to different levels:

- Employers;
- Individuals or families;
- Measures at the state level;
- Special measures that are relevant in the context of TERA project activities and already identified challenges:
 - Measures for schools and kindergartens
 - Measures for health centers and homes for the elderly
 - Measures for centers for social work.

The set of measures serves as a fundamental substantive starting point for the creation of the TERA educational and awareness program (and associated modules and online platform) and as a starting point for meeting the established multi-stakeholder committees that will meet in Pomurje and Posavje in the coming months. The project partners Development Center Murska Sobota and Regional Development Agency Posavje will be the first organizations to implement the measures in their internal operations, and in addition, during the consultations, they will encourage the implementation of the measures among other stakeholders as well.

A set of measures aimed at facilitating the coordination of professional and private life and raising awareness of the importance of a balanced division between work and private life is prepared in Slovenian and English.



2. GENERAL MEASURES FOR EMPLOYERS

2.1 Preparation of a plan for work-life balance

Organizations can prepare and update annual Plans on the work-life balance, which will enable them to set goals and outline the path to achieving them, the plans should include the existing legal options available to employees as well as the wishes of male and female workers that arise from the challenges they face.

2.2 Measuring satisfaction about the possibilities of work-life balance among employees

Employers should measure their employees' satisfaction with the possibilities of balancing their professional and private lives, offered to them on an annual basis. Standardized evaluation of satisfaction in the form of a survey questionnaire can offer feedback to employers in terms of developing their working environment and establishing a working climate that encourages and enables the coordination of professional and private life.

2.3 Promoting active fatherhood

Numerous studies have shown that fathers in working environments, fearing stigma and ridicule, often find themselves in an uncomfortable position when they would like to agree on a more flexible form of work or use of paternity leave, which would allow them to be more involved in the care and upbringing of children. Employers must be aware of these circumstances, overcome them and encourage active fatherhood (especially in cases of using sick leave to care for a child). Employers can also encourage active fatherhood through additional days of (un)paid paternity leave offered to fathers.

For people living and farming in rural areas:

For the self-employed or rural insured, additional awareness-raising on the legal possibilities of taking paternity leave, childcare leave and the rights deriving therefrom would be necessary.

2.4 Organizing a friendly return to work after taking parental leave or after another long absence from work

It makes sense for employers to continue to include workers who are on a long absence from work in internal communication and information, thereby facilitating their return to work and reducing the possibility of dissatisfaction.

2.5 Organizing and arranging (un)paid absence from work due to personal circumstances

Employers, together with employees and based on their needs, should identify and define special circumstances that can lead to (un)paid absence from work for employees and are related to the coordination of their private lives (for example, accompanying pregnant partners or the elderly and children during medical examinations, attending school plays, births, marriages and deaths, repairs and renovations, moving, longer trips and other personal errands).

For people living and farming in rural areas:

It should be possible to take leave and to be absent from work on an "ad hoc" basis, in cases which the employee(s) and the employer agree in advance (e.g., forage harvesting in good weather). A minimum number of days' notice may be set (e.g., 1 day before the absence is planned).

2.6 Incorporating the principle of gender equality and encouraging the work-life balance of employees into the culture of the organization

Employers should introduce the pursuit of the principle of gender equality as a fundamental value of the organizational culture and support the latter with several acts and regulations that will enable the achievement of this goal as well as improve the possibilities of harmonizing professional and private life. This includes the commitment to gender-neutral and balanced recruitment of new employees; zero tolerance for sexism and (sexual) harassment and violence in the workplace.



Particular attention should be paid to educating people working with farmers about the importance of gender equality and reconciling work and private life. This could be promoted in particular by the agricultural advisory service (staff working on complementary activities and farming families, or covering social security issues). Lectures on quality of life on farms, mental health and building good relationships should be encouraged - by extension services, CSDs and other social communities.

2.7 Organizing basic training to facilitate the coordination of professional and private life and to pursue gender equality within working environments

Employers should educate employees (at least) once a year about processes and mechanisms that inhibit gender equality in the workplace and thereby harm both employees and the development and success of organizations as such. In this type of training, it is necessary to emphasize the harmfulness of the operation of male and female gender stereotypes and the related limitation of gender norms and roles, thereby strengthening the possibilities of pursuing the goals, interests, and talents of both men and women.

2.8 Enabling flexible working hours or working from home (or working at another location)

The organization of work also has an important influence on the easier coordination of professional and private life. Flexible working hours allow employees to more easily coordinate other (private) obligations, and flexible working hours give employees the autonomy to schedule their work freely. The possibility of working from home or working at another location, which can take time away from employees on the way to work, also affects the better coordination of professional and private life.

2.9 Enabling part-time work

Employers should allow employees (who express this wish) to work with reduced working hours (4 or 6 hours of work per day), which will make it easier and more efficient for employed persons to allocate obligations related to work, caring work, and free time.

2.10 Organizing work in gender-mixed teams

Organizing work in gender-mixed teams can help to overcome many gender stereotypes and ideas that employees have towards the opposite sex and have a significant impact on building an organizational culture based on gender equality.

2.11 The possibility of refusing overtime and night work

Employers should offer their employees the option to refuse overtime and night work if they have problems balancing their private lives while performing this work.

2.12 Broad understanding of the responsibilities of care

Employers must gain the broadest understanding of the concept of care obligations, which must not be stereotypically limited to mothers of babies. Instead, measures must follow the fact that as children grow up, the needs of employees change and that both women (mothers) and men (fathers) must be equally involved in this. In addition, measures to facilitate the coordination of professional and private life also significantly facilitate the performance of caring tasks related to caring for the elderly and the sick.

2.13 A broad understanding of the importance of the concept of balancing professional and private life

Employers must offer measures to balance professional and private life to all their employees, not just young mothers. In doing so, they demonstrate a broad understanding of the importance of the concept of work-life balance, which is important and beneficial for all employees, regardless of their gender, parentage, or other personal circumstances – everyone benefits from a balanced work-life balance.



2.14 Coordination of leave with school holidays

Employers should allow employed persons with school-aged children to take leave on days or weeks that also coincide with school holidays, which will significantly contribute to the coordination of the professional and private lives of employees.

2.15 Establishing a system of rewards and incentives that do not depend on the care obligations and the gender of the employed person

Employers must use appropriate acts and regulations (and foreseen sanctions for violations) to ensure the possibility of transparent promotion of employees, regardless of their custodial obligations. In this way, equal participation and advancement are enabled for everyone, regardless of their circumstances, thereby contributing to building and maintaining an organizational culture based on gender equality.

2.16 Ensuring the possibility of (anonymous) expressing (dis)satisfaction with the measures that are available within the organization and that are intended to facilitate work-life balance

Employers should think about the most optimal way of expressing employees' (dis)satisfaction both with the current options available for easier coordination of professional and private life, as well as for expressing opinions, doubts, and impressions regarding the general pursuit of gender equality within the working environment. Opinions can be given in the dedicated box, they can be written in special notebooks or they can be collected electronically, with anonymity enabled.

2.17 Ensuring the possibility of offering psychological interviews

Employers should consider the possibility of providing psychological interviews with employees, which would be intended to reflect on (over)load, and (potential) burnout and to promote awareness of the importance of quality coordination of professional and private life, which also has a great impact on mental health.

2.18 Designation of a coordinator or working group for easier and better work-life balance and more effective pursuit of the principle of gender equality within organizations

Employers should appoint a working group or coordinator who will take care of highlighting challenges related to the coordination of professional and private life within the organization, will propose new and improved measures, and conduct a constant dialogue with employees, which will enable priority treatment of this important area. The coordinator or the work group should also constantly encourage the exchange of experiences related to the coordination of professional and private life among employees, which will make it even easier to identify new solutions. The working group must consist of a group of employees with different genders and family statuses (they must also include people without children and caring responsibilities), as the measures must serve everyone - everyone has obligations in their private life that must be coordinated with their professional life.

2.19 Encouraging and supporting activities that are part of employees' free or private time

Employers can actively support and encourage their employees in certain activities that the latter otherwise perform in their free time. In this way, employers can organize activities such as watching matches, sports games, cultural and theatrical content, and the like.

2.20 Awareness of the role of management in facilitating work-life balance at the level of work organizations

Employers, together with all management staff, must be aware of their role and responsibility for ensuring gender equality within work organizations and for adopting and upgrading measures that enable employees to more easily balance their professional and private lives. The pursuit of such goals will not only provide male and female workers



with equivalent work experience but will significantly increase the level of satisfaction both at the workplace and contribute to the improvement of business results.



3. GENERAL MEASURES FOR FAMILIES

3.1 Taking care of home and family is the task of everyone who is part of the family community

Parents must be aware that they teach their children first by example, whereby an important role is played by the division of work and tasks related to the so-called invisible work in the family - work related to taking care of the home and family (cleaning, cooking, tidying up, care for the young, the elderly and the sick). Stereotypes and related gender roles unjustifiably attribute this type of work only to women, so it is important to first raise awareness in the family of the great importance of this type of work, and then to ensure the active involvement of everyone who enjoys the fruits of this work, also in its performance.

3.2 Balancing professional and private life is an important element of well-being

The good coordination of professional and private life affects both the psychological and physical health of people, namely the constant search for balance is associated with feelings of guilt, helplessness, and exhaustion, which increases the level of stress and lowers the level of satisfaction with life, and can also lead to physical illnesses.

3.3 Recognizing and overcoming toxic masculinity

Toxic masculinity is the result of an outdated, stereotypical upbringing of boys based on assumptions such as boys don't cry; boys are always firm; violence is a legitimate source of expression of dissatisfaction; expressing emotions is associated with weakness, and so on. In families, toxic masculinity can have a markedly negative effect on the coordination of professional and private life, as it maintains the role of the man and father as the most important member of the family, which does not allow the building of equal relationships between partners and within the family.

3.4 Establishing a clear separation between work and private life

To effectively establish a balance between professional and private life, it is each person must set a dividing line between work and his private life. Such a dividing line will consequently lead to the setting of special priorities, which will shape the time dedicated (only) to work and, on the contrary, the time dedicated (only) to private life.

3.5 The right to disconnect

The right to disconnect is the right of an individual to no longer receive phone calls or respond to work-related messages and e-mails after a certain hour of the day. This right is an important element of harmonizing professional and private life, which has gained more emphasis recently - with the boom in remote work, which has made many people face the unpleasant consequences of the constant availability made possible by the Internet and remote work.

3.6 Knowledge of rights, local legislation, and nearby services

For a good work-life balance, it is necessary to know the legislation and the rights that derive from the latter and can enable better coordination of professional and private life. In addition, knowledge of the operation of important public services (kindergartens, schools, homes for the elderly, centers for social work, and other infrastructures), is also good and useful, since it can facilitate the coordination of professional and private life.

3.7 The importance of free time - time for yourself

The nature of private life also plays a large role in the balanced coordination of professional and private life, which must include special time dedicated only to the individual. This free time, time for yourself is necessary to maintain mental health and general well-being. Time spent doing activities that individuals enjoy makes them happy and strengthens their endurance.



3.8 Promoting equal opportunities for all children and overcoming gender stereotypes

Parents should encourage their children to pursue their interests and develop their talents, and it is important to overcome any stereotypes that suggest that there are certain career and personal paths that are more suitable for women than for men and vice versa. Understanding all public and private spaces and all career paths and decision-making places as places to which both women and men must have equal access also helps to better balance professional and private life.

3.9 Encouraging the inclusion of women in the labor market

The inclusion of women in the labor market, with which women, in addition to pursuing their own goals and desires, also gain important financial independence, is not self-evident, but an important historical victory of pioneers in the field of women's emancipation. With the involvement of women in (paid) work, the latter have often become the ones who - disregarding the large amount and burden of unpaid work they perform - are the ones who are most burdened when it comes to balancing professional and private life. It is therefore important that, while encouraging girls and women to pursue their career dreams and aspirations, we also do not forget the importance of providing public infrastructures that, for example, enable the protection of children and also the necessary changes in the direction of active fatherhood, which must be encouraged and promoted.

3.10 Active fatherhood

Active fatherhood begins with monitoring and participation in gynecological examinations of a pregnant woman and continues with participation in childbirth and equal inclusion in all elements of care and raising. Active fatherhood thus makes it possible to build healthy, solid emotional bonds between father and child, which have far-reaching positive consequences for everyone involved, with a significant impact on the amount of care and burdens that otherwise - in the context of a gender-stereotypical perception of parenthood - mainly belong to women.



4. SPECIAL MEASURES FOR KINDERGARTENS AND SCHOOLS

4.1 Introduction of the afternoon and holiday care for children in kindergartens and schoolboys and schoolgirls

Kindergartens and primary schools should consider the possibility of introducing afternoon childcare and holiday childcare, which is a big problem for people who live in the countryside, and especially for those who live and work there on farms. As the Survey on Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022) showed, respondents very often expressed difficulties related to childcare during the holidays (especially childcare for younger children who cannot join their parents at work) and the need for longer operation of kindergartens in the afternoon, which would have a positive impact on their chances of balancing their professional and private lives. In doing so, it would be appropriate to check the regulation of organized childcare for children of parents who are involved in other non-standard professions.

4.2 Later start of classes

A later start of classes would significantly improve the coordination possibilities of people living in the countryside, as it would not require them (and their children) to get up so early in the morning, which is particularly problematic for all those who also have obligations related to the barn in the mornings and livestock.

4.3 Taking into account the dynamics of life in the countryside and the distance from schools and kindergartens when organizing celebrations, events, and teacher-parent meetings

Work-life balance also depends on the successful resolution of conflicts that arise between individuals due to the various things they take on in life. Parents who live in the countryside, and especially those who are engaged in agricultural activities, are not able to always participate in school activities since they usually take place during their work in the stable or during other duties, which puts them in an unpleasant situation that is certainly felt by children as well.

4.4 Improving children's opportunities to participate in afternoon activities

Schools should also encourage the inclusion of children in activities offered to children in the afternoon and evening, being aware of the logistical difficulties associated with transporting children to these activities. The latter demands a lot of time from parents (as the research showed, especially mothers), which - if at all possible - they devote to transporting children back to the places where these activities take place. By organizing this type of public transportation for children in the afternoon as well, we would significantly influence the better work-life balance of people and also increase the possibilities of engaging children in the pursuit of their interests and the development of their talents.

4.5 Expansion of the existing network of branch kindergartens and schools

The majority of participants in the Survey of Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022) expressed the desire and need to open a larger number of branch schools and kindergartens, which, assuming proximity and easy accessibility, would also enable parents of children to balance their professional and private lives more easily.

Consideration should also be given to organising individual kindergarten units on farms - this could provide additional jobs in rural areas and a special environment for children. Such an organisation would facilitate access to kindergartens for people living in rural areas.



5. SPECIAL MEASURES FOR SOCIAL WORK CENTERS

5.1 Bringing services and information about services closer to rural areas

The participants in the Survey on Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022) repeatedly pointed out the problem of not knowing all the services that the Centers for Social Work offer and which can significantly affect the coordination of professional and private life (care for the elderly, care for the sick, ...), especially among women, who - as the research also showed - take on the greater part of such burdens. This should be countered by systematic informing of people living in the countryside, which could also take the form of offering mobile office hours (in the premises of local communities or offices) in the countryside.

5.2 Better information about possible sources of help when experiencing or perceiving violence

As shown by the Research on Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022), almost 70% (as many as 75% of women) of the respondents believed that there are not enough accessible sources of help for victims of violence in rural areas. It is necessary to penetrate the rural areas with this information about the possibilities of retreat and seeking help, as well as with general information about the incidence and frequency of violence, with the clearly expressed inadmissibility of violence. Only a life without fear makes it possible to find a balance between professional and private life and provides the conditions for a democratic life experience for men and women.

5.3 Expanding the range of services adapted to the dynamics and needs of rural areas

The participants in the Research on Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022) emphasized that Social Work Centers should better adapt their range of services to the dynamics and needs of rural areas - this would be best done through field visits and communication with (potential) end-user service. The analysis that was carried out within the framework of this project showed that people in rural areas want more customized services in their environments, especially for the elderly and elderly patients.

5.4 Increasing the provision of assistance services at home, especially visits to the elderly

Women in rural areas, in particular, spend a lot of time socializing and caring for the elderly or sick elderly, sometimes doing second or third-shift work in this way. As the analysis of the Research on Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022) showed, it would be extremely important to expand the range of services in terms of offering more (free) help services at home, also in the form of companionship and care for the elderly who, for one reason or another, do not they may or may not want to become part of institutional care.

5.5 Establishment of daycare centers in villages

Moving away from home villages can be a great burden and stress for many rural residents (especially the elderly), which in turn affects the quality of their lives and the possibility of alleviating certain health problems. Most of the daycare centers where relatives can take the elderly family members during the day are located in cities, which represents a big obstacle for people living in the countryside - by establishing daycare centers in villages, we could improve the quality of life and offer different options for spending time. This would also significantly relieve the burden, especially on women, who usually bear the burden of caring for the elderly.

5.6 Changes in work organization – more e-services and extension of working hours

People who live (many of them also work in rural areas) have repeatedly pointed out in the Rural Gender Equality Survey (TERA, 2022) that Social Work Centers should adjust their services in such a way that more of the latter can be done remotely (via electronic devices and digital communication), or to extend the working hours of the Centers in cities, which would save a lot of time and make it easier to organize their obligations and thus also make it easier to find a balance between professional and private life.



6. SPECIAL MEASURES FOR NURSING HOMES AND HEALTH CENTERS

6.1 Provision of (preventive) mobile examinations in rural areas

The quality of life and the level of satisfaction with life, which is directly related to our ability to balance professional and private life, are also affected by health care. Distance from the health infrastructure, in connection with stigma and shame about one's own body still present to a certain extent in rural areas, can lead to non-participation in preventive examinations, even screening programs aimed at early detection of cancer. This should be seriously addressed and thought about how health institutions can penetrate the rural areas with certain contents and inform, and if possible - carry out certain examinations (for example (self) breast examination, ...).

6.2 Provision of mobile (preventive) psychological treatment in rural areas

In rural areas, mental health care remains quite stigmatized and neglected, however, this can be reflected in the actual psychological state of people, which is proven to worsen with increasing (over)load. A great effort should therefore be included in campaigns to inform and provide psychological first aid in rural areas, which would consequently shed light on the strong and important connection between mental well-being and a balanced balance between professional and private life.

6.3 Paying attention to alcoholism in rural areas

As the Research on Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022) showed, alcoholism in rural areas is a pressing problem that negatively affects family and partner relationships (almost 70% of all respondents agreed with this), so it should be given more detailed attention. Alcoholism has a strong impact on family dynamics, destroys the equality of relationships, and also negatively affects the possibilities of balancing professional and private life. Programs of raising awareness, informing, and offering assistance in rural areas would certainly qualitatively contribute to this, especially taking into account the interaction of alcoholism, violence, and strictly hierarchical power relations in relationships.

6.4 Construction and establishment of homes for the elderly and daycare centers for the elderly in the countryside, in the heart of the village

The participants in our Research on Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022) have repeatedly pointed out that it would be better for the elderly and the sick, who are mainly cared for by women in the current circumstances, if they were offered accommodation in homes for the elderly on rural areas, instead of homes that are in urban centers. Indeed, many people are strongly tied to village environments, so for many, going to the cities is out of the question. Such homes would not only improve the quality of life for the elderly but would offer them new social experiences by offering them activities similar to those the elderly were used to on farms and would enable their relatives to balance their professional and private lives more easily.

6.5 Arrangement of transportation of the elderly and sick elderly to health services

A common reason for not attending or late attending medical services and examinations for people from rural areas (especially for the elderly and those who also work and engage in agricultural activities in rural areas) can also be found in the geographical distance of some services, which is in connection with logistical obstacles (car, driver's license) is a big problem. Undoubtedly, the organization of transportation for the elderly would also have a positive effect on their younger family members, relieving them of the burden and enabling them to organize their private time differently.



7. NATIONAL LEVEL MEASURES

7.1 Laws and measures

Concern for the consistent implementation of national and transnational legislation (Directive on coordinating the professional and private life of parents and caregivers), which is developing in the direction of a more active role of fathers, enabling flexible forms of employment and emphasizing job satisfaction, which is also important in pursuing the concept and values of gender equality as a goal. Legislative measures must sufficiently follow and take into account the specificities of the environment in which farmers, women farmers and others who simply live in rural areas live, and the repeatedly proven higher persistence of gender stereotypes that persist in rural areas can make it more difficult to achieve equality.

7.2 Education and awareness

The state must systematically approach raising awareness and education in the field of active fatherhood, the importance of balancing professional and private life, and especially in the area of the consequences of current gender (in)equality in the countryside identified in the Research on Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022): violence and lack of aid resources; alcoholism; geographical distance from key infrastructure and life satisfaction - also as a result of stereotypical gender roles.

7.3 Rural development also as development towards achieving gender equality

It is imperative that, at the national level, the need to understand rural development also in the pursuit of gender equality, is strengthened. Only this kind of development will enable all genders to have an equal life experience and as such will contribute to the greater development and progress of the countryside. Existing gender inequality has concrete consequences for the lives of men and women, which was also confirmed by the Research on Gender Equality in Rural Areas (TERA, 2022), and which show countless mechanisms and patterns that still determine the subordination of women in rural areas and as such, this subordination should be properly addressed and overcome.