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**INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL**

**Capacity-building for mainstreaming a gender perspective into national policies and programmes to support the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS**

**Written statement\***

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**Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men:**  
**Reflections on European policies**

Equality between women and men is vital to the

include, affordable childcare, proper maternity and child care leaves, flexible working time arrangements, “flexicurity,” part-time work, and employer’s involvement. Although many positive developments have been achieved, there is still much work to be done.

**Employment rates** of women in many European countries exceed or are close to 60% participation levels, the highest being in the Nordic countries, and the lowest – in southern European countries. The Baltic countries, one of which I represent here, already reached 60%. The Nordic and the Baltic countries also have low gaps between male and female employment rates contrary to southern European countries which tend to have much larger gaps. In Lithuania, the gap between women’s and men’s employment rates is one of the smallest – the third smallest in the EU. Even more, Lithuania has one of the best indicators of employment rates of women raising children below 12 years of age. But very often the mothers carry the double burden of working full time at work and at home.

The significant structural difference in the participation of men and women in the labour market is related to the gender composition of the workforce in different sectors and professions. Men and women tend to work in different sectors and fewer than one in four workers is employed in sectors that are more or less gender-mixed. A large majority works in sectors that are either predominantly male (construction, manufacturing, agriculture) or predominantly female (education, health, social services). As a rule, earnings in male dominated sectors are higher than in female dominated ones resulting in the gender pay gap. One of the reasons for gender-segregated labour markets are traditional gender stereotypes, which remain deeply rooted in the Baltic countries.

Another question is part time work. A much higher proportion of women work part-time: 29% of women compared to 7% of men (in 2005). While part-time work is generally seen as positive from a work-family-life balance perspective, it may adversely affect the career path: part time jobs are typically more monotonous with fewer opportunities for learning or formal training compared to full-time jobs. And finally, part-time jobs are connected with lower income and, consequently, lower pensions.

And the last point - development of equality and family friendly enterprises and mainstreaming of gender equality into corporate social responsibility of companies. This modern trend in the EU led to the creation of a network of equality enterprises. In Lithuania, criteria and indicators for gender equal enterprises were developed in 2005. Since then an annual selection of gender equal enterprises has been arranged where enterprises are nominated as Equality Enterprises. The network of gender equal enterprises involves 50 companies already. In 2007, a family friendly enterprise model was created and tested in one of the Lithuanian Universities. It was then presented to the social partners; who have been trained to apply this model, including through incorporating relevant provisions into collective agreements.

**Care facilities** and services are extremely important in the lives of working women and men. This applies, in particular, to childcare services as care responsibilities constitute the main obstacle to (full) employment. At the 2002 Barcelona Summit, the European Council set targets for Member States to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years of age and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age. About half of the European countries have already met the Barcelona target for children above 3 years of age, but childcare coverage for children below 3 years of age remains much below the target in many countries. The best childcare coverage is in northern and western Europe, the lowest – in southern Europe and in post-socialist countries, including the Baltic States. But alongside with the question of coverage, there are questions of affordability and flexibility of working hours. In this respect, a wide variety of different forms of arrangements exists across the countries.

The question of availability of child care facilities is directly connected with variety of leaves: **maternity, paternity, parental (or child care) leaves**. The minimum standards of these leaves are determined by two directives of the European Commission, setting the minimum length of 14 weeks of maternity leave before and/or after the birth of the child, and the individual (non transferable) right of the father and the mother of not less than 3 months of unpaid parental leave. Compensation of earnings during the maternity leaves varied from 55% in Slovakia to 100% in many countries (2004). It should be noted that some countries use a ceiling for these benefits. Paternal leave provisions also vary greatly: from 3 months unpaid leave to up to leaves extending until the child is 3 years of age with a high level of compensation for lost earnings. The payments during the parental leave are: flat-rate benefits or compensation of earnings at some percentage. Very often they are also combined: some period is covered by compensation, and the rest – by a flat-rate benefit. Compensation of earnings is more typical for the Nordic and post-socialist countries. At present, the longest parental leave with the highest level of compensation of earnings is in Lithuania. Parental leave can be extended until the child is 3 years of age, the compensation for the first year's earnings is 100% (a ceiling does exist, but it is very high), for the second year it is 85%, and during the third year parents are entitled to a low flat-rate benefit. Recently a new social guarantee was introduced for a parent using parental leave: parental leave can be combined with part-time work. In this case, the parental benefit covers the difference between the current salary and the full benefit. This option allows the mother (or sometimes) the father not to lose their qualifications.

As noted earlier, all these provisions are mainly used by women. In connection with the tendency of increasing the length of paid parental leave in many countries, and particularly, in the Baltic countries, there have been serious discussions about its impact on women's careers and fertility. In spite of the right of both parents to parental leave, most of those who use this right are mothers. One of the reasons why fathers do not use their right to paternal leave is the higher income of men. If benefits are low, the loss of income is higher. In these circumstances, the longer the parental leave lasts the higher the probability for women to be considered "secondary earner in the family", reinforcing the role of the man as "main income earner." If parental leaves are

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100% of compensation of earnings. Paternity leave has become very popular among Lithuanian fathers, and is used increasingly. But the difference in philosophy behind shared parental leave in the Nordic countries and paternity leave in the Baltic countries should be noted. In the Nordic countries, shared parental leave is based on sharing of responsibilities, but in the Baltic countries the paternity leave is devoted “to assist women” during their maternity leave. The Nordic countries regard women and men as equal caregivers, but in the Baltic countries mothers are regarded as primary caregivers, and fathers as assisting and helping them.

In recent years, “flexicurity” has become very popular as a tool for promoting and achieving work and life balance. Flexicurity (a new word for “social protection for flexible work forces”) enables an employee to combine paid work with other social obligations and responsibilities. This refers to diverse leave schemes (parental or educational), flexible working hours, reduced hours schemes, etc., while preserving social security provisions. Flexicurity brings additional security, but does not automatically enhance equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market and private sphere. If women alone will continue to take career breaks and reduce their working time to take up caring responsibilities, this will only reinforce the role of women as primary caregiver and secondary earner.

It is important to note that in all countries women work more hours than men when paid work and unpaid domestic work are considered together. This is even the case for women who have part-time jobs. Data from a European working conditions survey in 2005 show that, on average, in 27 European countries women work 35 hours in paid employment compared with 42 hours of men. But they devote three times more hours than men to domestic work. And when unpaid domestic work is taken into account, it becomes clear that women work significantly longer weekly hours than men. In cases of families with children, mothers more often shift to part-time work, while fathers tend to work longer weekly hours in paid work. Unequal sharing of responsibilities has negative impacts on women’s opportunities in education and labour market, participation in public life, and, finally, leisure time usage. Therefore, on the European level, the work-family balance paradigm is shifting to work-life paradigm.

**Gender stereotypes** reinforce inequality in the distribution of responsibilities and division of paid and unpaid labour. Stereotypes are based on perceptions of women as natural care-givers and men as ideal workers and deficient care-givers. The impact of gender stereotypes in the process of socialization of children is great, and quite often is reinforced by families, religious institutions, and the media. Therefore, European countries emphasize the role of education. Many countries have revised curricula at all levels of education, including teacher’s training. In 2008, the European Parliament adopted a resolution with the goal to end gender stereotypes in marketing and advertising. Many countries have launched awareness-raising campaigns to address gender stereotypes, particularly in the media. A number of innovative projects aimed at the

