



Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together

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RESET aims to address the challenge of Gender Equality in Research Institutions in a diversity perspective, with the objective to design and implement a user-centered, impact-driven and inclusive vision of scientific excellence.

Consortium partners



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Redesigning
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Together

Toolbox on implementing actions towards work / studies and per- sonal life balance, impact assess- ment and lessons learnt

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Abbreviations

AUTH	Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (GR)
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EU	European Union
GE	Gender Equality
GEP	Gender Equality Plan
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HRD	Human Resource Development
INSPIRE	Centre of Excellence on Inclusive Gender Equality in Research & Innovation: Creating Knowledge & Engaging in Collaborative Action
KSH	Knowledge Support Hub
RESET	Redesigning Equality and Scientific Excellence Together
RE-WIRING	Realising Girls' and Women's Inclusion, Representation and Empowerment
R&I	Research and Innovation
RUB	Ruhr University Bochum (DE)
ScPo	Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques (Sciences Po, FR)
TARGET	Taking a Reflexive approach to Gender Equality for institutional Transformation
UBx	Bordeaux University (FR)
UOULU	Oulu University (FIN)
UL	University of Łódź (PL)

U.Porto	University of Porto (PT)
UN	United Nations
WLB	Work Life Balance
WLC	Work Life Conflict
WLOC	Work=Life on Campus
WP	Work Package

Executive Summary

The following document, “Toolbox on implementing actions towards work / studies and personal life balance, impact assessment and lessons learnt” (D. 6.4) is submitted by RUB as part of Work Package 6 – *Act upon governance and upgrade existing excellence policy towards greater inclusiveness*. The purpose of WP6 is to foster institutional change in the RESET project. Following this purpose, the tasks in WP6 address the constitutional level of policy-making, the operational level of implementation and the personal level of decision making. Hereby, the project relies on the methodology of co-designing measures with stakeholders in the project and the RESET universities.

This toolbox is the output of Task 6.4 – Co-designing new practices and guidelines to balance personal life and work / studies. Task 6.4 addresses the institutions’ awareness and responsibility towards their employees and students. It supports the co-design and implementation of measures that ensure the compatibility of career / studies and personal life, and encourages active fatherhood. D6.4 is structured as a comprehensive toolbox designed to provide HEIs with actionable insights, methodologies, and tools for fostering work/study-life balance and promoting gender equality in academic institutions. It introduces into the concepts of WLB, and is based on an impact assessment and lessons learnt from the project’s GEP 1.0 implementation. It analyses the context on WLB-related data on EU-level and explores the critical topic of balancing work and private life in academia, addressing the specific challenges faced by student parents in Europe. The Impact Assessment evaluates the measures implemented during the RESET project in GEP-implementing institutions. The Lessons Learnt section focuses on key areas such as the importance of leadership sensitivity, supporting students with care responsibilities, promoting active fatherhood, and ensuring accessible communication. Six tools offer practical steps for universities to implement family-friendly and work-life balance policies. They cover policy recommendations and student support guides to promoting active fatherhood and improving communication about institutional WLB measures.



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1. Introduction

“Equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay.

The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages in favour of the under-represented sex.” (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Art. 23 – Equality between women and men)

In line with the European Union's fundamental rights, the EU has introduced measures to promote work-life balance in order to strengthen Europe's social dimension and guarantee citizens more effective rights. One key measure is the **directive on work-life balance for parents and carers** (2019). It aims to both, preserve existing rights and create new, improved rights for women and men throughout the EU. The promotion of work-life balance is closely linked to gender equality: by creating equal opportunities at work and at home, the unequal distribution of care and nursing responsibilities between men and women should be equalised. By this, women are meant to take better advantage of their professional opportunities and career paths and at the same time improve their economic independence and work-life balance.

The EU has developed various documents and measures to promote work-life balance and strengthen gender equality. A central element is the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017)¹, which aims to ensure equal access to the labour market, fair working conditions and work-life balance. Furthermore, the aforementioned **directive on work-life balance for parents and carers** is an important step to meet these goals. It was proposed by the Commission in December 2016 and adopted by the Council of the EU on June 13, 2019 after various negotiations and adjustments. Member states had until August of 2022 to transpose the directive into national law. This directive creates new and improved rights, including paternity leave, parental leave, carers' leave and flexible working arrangements.

In addition, Article 23 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000)² ensures equality between women and men in all areas, including employment, work and pay. Article 33 of the Charter guarantees the legal, economic and social protection of the family and promotes the reconciliation of work and family life.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1226&langId=en>

² https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf



Taking on care work for children and other family members shapes people's lives in crucial ways, especially in regards to paid work and career development. As the *European Institute for Gender Equality* (EIGE) points out, women are still the ones mainly responsible for childcare throughout Europe. According to EIGE's study, about 56 % of women with children under 12 years old spend at least 5 hours per day on childcare, compared to 26 % of men (see Figure 1 & Figure 2). Looking at parents of children aged 0-5, the percentage of parents who spend 5 hours or more a day on childcare varies considerably between Member States, with an EU average of 47 % (EIGE, 2023).

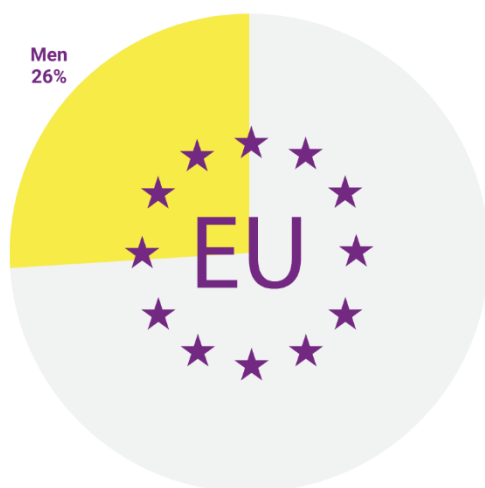


Figure 2: Proportion of men who spend at least 5 hours per day on childcare (EIGE, 2023)

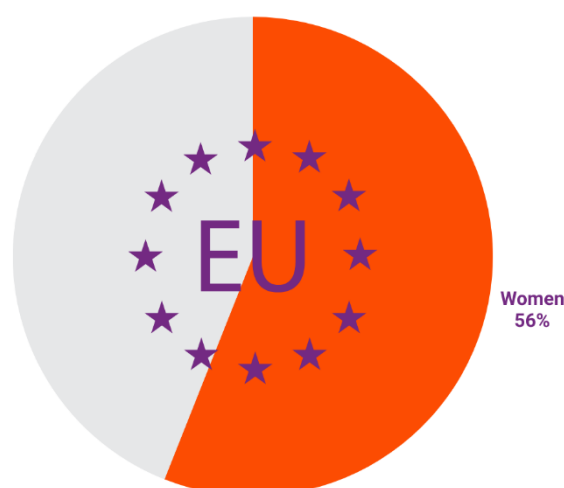


Figure 1: Proportion of women who spend at least 5 hours per day on childcare (EIGE, 2023)

Furthermore, EIGE points out that the disproportionate burden of childcare on women is a significant factor driving gender inequality in the labour market, contributing to disparities in pay and pensions. Thus, the proportion of women in employment across the EU is lower than that of men. In the EU, 70% of women with childcare duties are employed, compared to 84% of men. Additionally, women with care responsibilities are more likely to work part-time (38%) compared to men (19%), affecting their long-term career growth and financial stability. Women are also more likely to be full-time homemakers, with 11% in this role compared to just 1% of men. The unequal sharing of caregiving duties between genders reinforces the notion that caregiving is primarily a woman's responsibility. This expectation limits women's opportunities for career advancement, economic independence, and achieving a work-life balance (see figures 3 & 4).

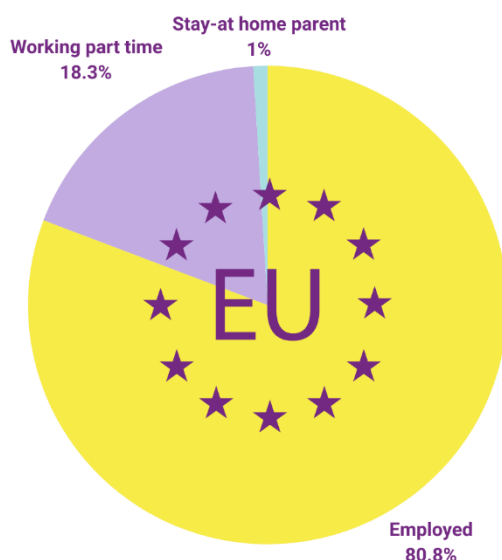


Figure 3: Employment status of parents in percentage, by gender. Here: men (EIGE 2023)

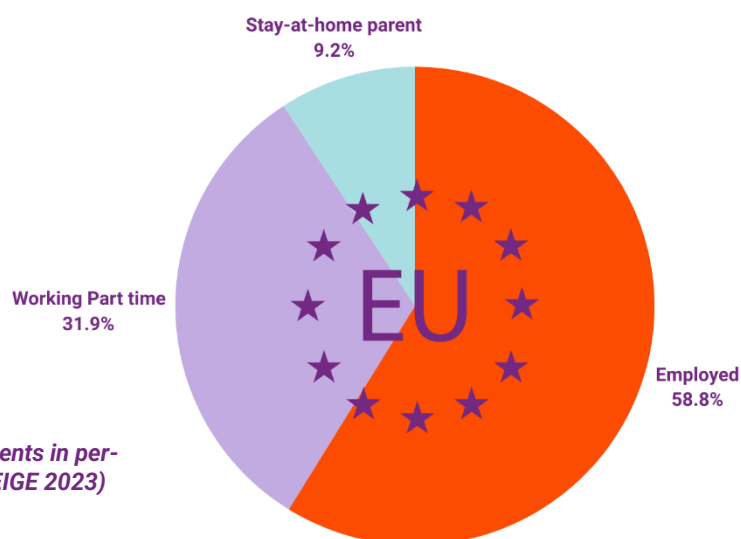


Figure 4: : Employment status of parents in percentage, by gender. Here: women (EIGE 2023)

The high drop-out rates of women from science in particular are related to the economic inequalities that we have presented based on the EIGE results. This is the context in which we consider questions of care distribution between genders, as well as the distribution of time between working hours and other areas of life at HEIs. We focus here on employees with care responsibilities and students who have care obligations on top of their studies.

Structure of the toolbox

This document is structured as a comprehensive toolbox designed to provide HEIs with actionable insights, methodologies, and tools for fostering work/study-life balance and promoting gender equality in academic institutions. While the introduction begins by giving the context on WLB-related data on EU-level, the methodological approach (chapter 2), outlines how data were collected and analysed to inform the toolbox's development, and references the outputs of sister projects.

Chapter 3 explores the critical topic of balancing work and private life in academia, addressing the specific challenges faced by student parents in Europe and examining the broader concept of Work-Life Balance vs. Work-Life Conflict.

The Impact Assessment in chapter 4 evaluates the measures implemented during the RESET project in GEP-implementing institutions. The chapter concludes with a takeaway section summarising the most important findings.

In chapter 5, the Lessons Learnt section, based on the findings presented in chapter 3 and 5, focusses on key areas such as the importance of leadership sensitivity, supporting students with care responsibilities, promoting active fatherhood, and ensuring accessible communication.

The Tools presented in chapter 6 offer practical steps for universities to implement family-friendly and work-life balance policies. These tools cover a wide range of strategies, from policy recommendations and student support guides to promoting active fatherhood and improving communication about institutional WLB measures.

Finally, the conclusions and outlook summarise the overall findings and point towards future developments, followed by detailed References and Annexes that provide additional data and contributions related to the RESET project's initiatives.



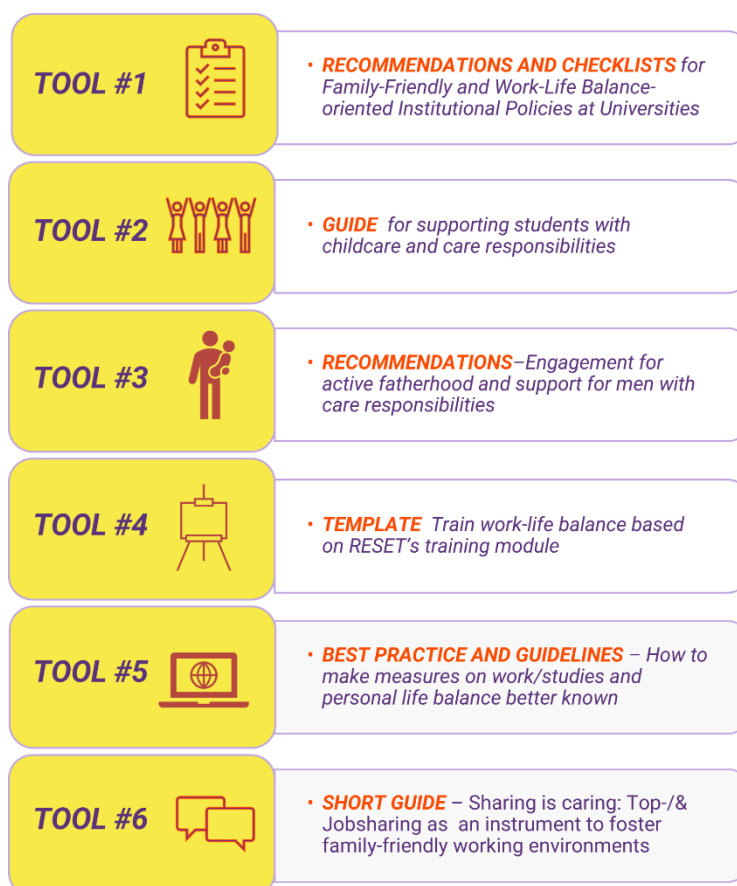


Figure 5: Overview of Tools in this toolbox

Central purposes of this document are to:

- ➔ **Fostering Work/Study-Life Balance:** The document aims to provide universities with comprehensive strategies and tools to promote reconciliation of professional or academic responsibilities and personal life, particularly for faculty, staff, and students with caregiving duties.
- ➔ **Promoting Gender Equality:** It addresses the systemic gender imbalances in academic institutions, particularly around caregiving responsibilities, by offering measures to support both women and men in balancing work with family life, while encouraging active fatherhood and dismantling traditional gender norms.
- ➔ **Evaluating and Improving Institutional Policies:** The document serves to assess and enhance existing institutional policies related to work-life balance, highlighting successful interventions implemented through the RESET project. It offers



evidence-based recommendations and best practices to ensure that universities can create more inclusive and supportive environments.

- **Providing Practical Tools for Implementation:** A key purpose is to equip universities with actionable tools, such as checklists, career-life planning guides, and flexible work arrangements, to effectively implement work-life balance and family-friendly policies across departments and academic units.
- **Raising Awareness and Encouraging Cultural Change:** The document seeks to raise awareness among university leadership and staff about the importance of work-life balance, promoting cultural shifts that support flexible working environments and improve the overall well-being of university communities.

2. Methodological Approach

As in other project deliverables (Niebel, 2024a, Niebel, 2024b), methodological approaches of participatory design (livari et al., 2023) institutional research and qualitative social research are intertwined and are followed in this deliverable. Data-analysis that leads to the impact assessment in chapter 3 is based on the analysis of the results of surveys and focus group discussions held in the scope of WP1 (GEP Design and Implementation) and based on GEPs 1.0. Additionally, an internal survey among RESET teams (UBx, UL, U.Porto) was conducted in order to get an overview on the current state of development with regard to WLB and family-friendly policies at RESET's institutions.

RESET's CoPs have been involved in the development of this deliverable in different ways:

- Through the dissemination of RESET's Media Campaign Faces of Campus exhibition WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS (2023):
- Through the involvement in two RESET events related to the themes of WLB and family-friendly institutions: (October, 2023); (May 2024)
- Through the re-evaluation of co-designing sessions, and other actions of RESET, in which questions around WLB were not explicitly the main area, but became central to the participants (co-designing sessions with women in leadership positions in 2023; HR-experts of RESET institutions in 2022; RESET campaign on the International Day of Women in Sciences, IDWIS 2022).

This involvement has provided us with a basis and an overview of the status quo at RESET universities. The preparation of this deliverable was therefore co-designed with teams of the RESET consortium and RESETs CoPs.

A key methodological aspect of the RESET project is the collaborative creation of instruments, measures, and documentation. This process is rooted in co-design principles, which draw on innovative design thinking techniques to ensure that users and stakeholders are actively involved in developing solutions (Durall et al., 2023; livari, 2018; livari et al., 2023). Within Work Package 6 (WP6) of the RESET project, this approach is executed



in two phases: first, by engaging local RESET project teams in the design and development of co-design sessions, and then by extending this involvement to the broader local communities. Following the Grounded Theory methodological approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), we aimed to discover patterns, relationships, and concepts within the data, and clustered the findings of the analysis into central categories.

The co-designing sessions with women in leadership positions were conducted in the spring of 2023, and guided by the teams of RUB, UBx, and UOULU, which developed together a template for the conduction of the sessions. They were conducted on site at UBx, U.Porto, RUB and UOULU by members of the local project teams and minuted by them (for further information on the workshops, see Niebel, 2024a). These results were analysed by the team of RUB, following the principles of qualitative content analysis (Flick, 2018) and Grounded Theory Methodology (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). We explored patterns, relationships, and concepts within the data without imposing predefined categories or assumptions. As elements of institutional research (Posselt, et al. 2020) these results were further processed into the lessons learnt and tools of this toolbox.

Reference to sister-project's outputs

Elements of Work Life Balance (WLB) and Work Life Conflict (WLC) are not only focused on by RESET, but also a priority of other Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe funded projects. The **RE-WIRING** project focuses on gender gaps in employment and enterprise. Their *Toolkit on Gender Gap in Representation at Work* (2024) also emphasises WLB as a crucial element in fostering Gender Equality throughout European and African societies. Another task in RE-WIRING is to highlight how people handle work and family roles in organisations and explore ways organisations can make positive changes in policies. Here, also the institutional communication is focused in collaboration with managers in organisations.

The project **INSPIRE** presents in its report *Initiating Change Beyond the Centre. A literature review of gender equality plans in research organisations across Europe* by the project's Knowledge and Support Hub (KSH) "Widening Participation" contextual factors that affect the implementation of GE-instruments in the R&I system (Krzaklewska et al., 2023). As the report points out, the "human resources perspective" is central to initiatives aimed at fostering WLB and supporting women's careers, particularly in the development of Gender Equality Plans (GEPs). Examples include flexible working arrangements, reduced teaching loads, and family-friendly solutions such as on-campus nurseries (Krzaklewska et al., 2023). Moreover, their report highlights the strategic framing, promotion and communication of gender equality. In this context, studies from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) highlight that work-life balance, specifically addressing the challenges of balancing motherhood with academic careers, is an effective tool for generating interest in GE among key stakeholders (Linková & Mergaert 2021; Krzaklewska et al., 2023). However, the report also points at a limited scope of GE policies, as they often overly focus on WLB and maternity leave, potentially reinforcing traditional gender roles and stereotypes.



In reference to Husu and Peterson (2022), they emphasize that a narrow focus on WLB and motherhood may perpetuate gender segregation, and detract from other important gender equality areas (Krzaklewska et al., 2023).

Chaves and Benshop (2023) point out in their INSPIRE KSH-report *Deepening & Sustaining Change* how parenthood, caregiving, and WLB act as systemic barriers to change within academia: neoliberal discourses and practices shape these barriers, often leading to women experiencing fragmented or non-linear career paths due to family formation and child-rearing responsibilities, which hinder their career progression. Based on Amsler and Motta (2019), they argue that parenthood, especially motherhood, is framed as a professional deficit in academia, overlooking the complexities of care responsibilities. This framing leads to the exclusion of both women and men who provide care, limiting their opportunities for career advancement and knowledge production. Based on a study in Ireland (Maxwell, Connolly, and Ni Laoire 2019) they emphasize that on an organizational level, maternity leave is often viewed as a burden, shaping gender dynamics in academia and reinforcing institutional barriers (Chaves & Benshop, 2023, p.20).

The Horizon 2020 project *TARGET* dedicated a co-creation workshop to WLB in academia. Core-questions were how research organizations implement work-life-balance policies in their GEP to counteract the leaky pipeline and patriarchal structures within academia, and how gender criteria could be integrated in higher education quality assurance to enshrine gender equality as an aspect of excellence (TARGET, 2021, p.3). Their deliverable *6.5 Resources on Work-Life-Balance and Gender Criteria in Quality Assessment, including minutes of 3rd Co-Creation Workshop* (TARGET, 2021) not only gives insights into the conduction of, and information discussed in the workshop, but also presents best practice examples from all across Europe. It is a highly valuable source for RESET's deliverable 6.4.

The insights from sister projects like RE-WIRING, INSPIRE, and TARGET help frame RESET's toolbox by highlighting the broader importance of Work-Life Balance (WLB) in promoting gender equality. They align with RESET's emphasis on flexible work and parental leave policies, and add context by emphasizing the importance of integrating WLB in GEPs on the one hand, and warn against overly focusing on motherhood on the other hand, which could reinforce gender roles. This complements RESET's inclusive approach, supporting both men and women in caregiving roles, and adds information, and content for the development of this toolbox.



3. Balancing work and private life in academia

From a gender perspective, balancing of work and private life - especially in relation to care tasks - has long been the subject of research extending on the field of academia (e.g., Benshop & Verloo, 2006; Lewis & Humbert, 2010; Matias et al. 2022). Here, crucial questions arise towards the extent to which parents are impaired in their career development in the field of science, and furthermore how women and their career developments are affected by this (Hendrix, 2017). At the same time, regarding the conception of science and academic subjects, it can be noted that the problem of parenthood is often attributed to women, making them seen as potential mothers whose situation is also problematised (Bomert & Leinfeller, 2017; Paulitz et al. 2015; Thébault & Taylor, 2017). In this context, mothers in academia are charged with balancing and managing these different roles (Cohen, Miller & Izenkova 2022).

Cukut Krilić et al. (2018) point out that despite varying national laws and infrastructures, an idealized view of academia persists across countries, where full-time hours are considered the norm, causing a strong vertical segregation of women's academic careers. Regardless of national legal frameworks, women take most caregiving responsibilities in European countries.

Both, male and female scientists and researchers claim excessive workloads that spill over into their personal time. Especially the postdoctoral period is regarded as being the most stressful, due to its volatile and precarious career phase. That makes the early-career researchers and especially female early-career researchers, a very vulnerable group. The authors argue that merely supporting women in academia is insufficient, and a fundamental shift is needed to challenge the male-dominated career model and reshape the academic and family systems (Cukut Krilić et al., 2018).

This illustrates the problematization of parenthood in academia. As care work and equality in the distribution of care work is a very multifaceted issue, it does not only imply a question of goodwill of partners or support on the side of employers. It is closely linked to the dynamics of gendered relationships and internalized within gender roles that affect partnerships, care, and self-relations (Lauggas, 2021; Thébault & Taylor, 2017). At the same time, it cannot be solely attributed to the individual academics, but is connected to the systemic structure of academic work. This is where both the issues of work cultures and employer's support become relevant.

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated care situations for parents - and especially mothers (Craig & Churchill, 2021). Also in the context of science and research, the pandemic has sharpened and brought into the centre of attention a condition that presents a double burden on parents among academics and students (Garraio et al., 2022; Minello et al. 2021). Related to this, the balance between work and family, as well as other aspects of life, is an issue that concerns both employees and employers and is systematically



intertwined with inequality, especially in the field of science (Górska et al., 2021). As the RESET project is about sustainable influencing and improving the cultures at our universities, the demands and measures of work/study/career balance represent a central reference point of the measures in the project's work packages 5 and 6.

RESET's focus on Work-life balance refers to the reconciliation of the different social roles and environments in our daily lives. Here, the relation between work and non-work plays a central role (Richert-Kaźmierska & Stankiewicz 2016). At the same time, it is a term that is not clearly defined, but instead is both a social construct and a discourse (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). It is clear that WLB is subject to personal and institutional negotiations and practices. Thus, reconciling work with other areas of life can involve many different dimensions, such as health, family, social activity and personal interests, as well as community engagement. It is this entanglement between the different spheres of life, we are going to focus in this document by putting the emphasis on the institutional responsibilities as employers.

3.1. Student parents in Europe

As the most recent report on social and economic conditions of student life in Europe points out, 12% of students across Europe report being parents, with an average of 1.9 children per parent (Hauschildt, 2024, p. 32). The situation varies widely across Europe, with countries like Finland, Iceland, Latvia, and Norway having the highest proportion of student parents (21% or more), while countries like Switzerland, France, and Azerbaijan report only 5% or fewer student parents (Hauschildt, 2024). Mothers are typically more represented than fathers among student parents, and most are found in Master's programs or non-university institutions.

The need for childcare, especially for younger children, demands considerable time, which results in student parents often studying at a lower intensity. Most student parents spend less than 20 hours per week on academic work, while simultaneously dedicating, on average, 21 hours per week to childcare, although this varies significantly by country. For instance, parents in Iceland, Austria, Slovakia, and Azerbaijan spend over 30 hours per week on childcare, while those in Lithuania, Norway, Ireland, Malta, and Portugal spend less than 15 hours per week (Hauschildt, 2024).

The age of the student's youngest child plays a major role in the time dedicated to childcare. For example, in Austria, Azerbaijan, and Finland, more than half of student parents have a youngest child under the age of six, which greatly increases the amount of time spent on caregiving. Conversely, in Ireland, Malta, and Portugal, where more than 60% of children are older than six, student parents tend to spend less time on childcare (Hauschildt, 2024).

As Wazinski et al. (2022) point out, caregiving students face challenges as they try to manage both academic responsibilities and their caregiving duties, whether caring for children, elderly relatives, or other dependents. The most significant challenges include



severe time constraints, leading to difficulties in balancing study and care. Many caregiving students report experiencing physical and mental health problems, such as exhaustion, stress, anxiety, and emotional strain. Additionally, they often feel isolated, struggling to maintain friendships or participate in social activities due to their caregiving duties. This isolation is further compounded by tensions within their families and a lack of time for paid employment, which often leads to financial difficulties. Institutional barriers include rigid course schedules, mandatory attendance requirements, and inflexible deadlines, which make it difficult for them to fulfil academic obligations. Many feel that lecturers and university staff do not understand their situation and are hesitant to ask for accommodations, fearing they will be perceived as less committed to their studies. As a result, many caregiving students conceal their caregiving responsibilities, which contributes to their sense of isolation.

In addition to time constraints, student parents experience role conflict, reconciling the responsibilities as parents, students, and often employees (Hauschildt, 2024, p. 35). This can lead to time poverty, particularly for those with younger children, and significant stress, which can negatively impact their mental health, academic performance, and even increase dropout rates (Ajayi et al., 2022; Conway et al., 2021). A lack of adequate childcare facilities, inflexible academic schedules, and varying levels of institutional support across countries exacerbate these challenges. Caregiving students often depend on informal support networks, such as family members, to share caregiving tasks, though some students face the burden of care alone (Wazinski et al., 2022). This is especially problematic as student parents are generally older and more likely to have entered higher education through non-traditional routes, which adds to their sense of isolation and the challenges of fitting into academic life (Hauschildt, 2024, p. 35).

This links to the need for more understanding and support from HEIs. Key support measures include more flexible deadlines, remote learning options, alternative assessment formats, and specific caregiving-related resources like on-campus care centers (Wazinski et al., 2022).

3.2. Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance issues affect various aspects of work, as well as personal life. RESET aims to draw attention to the workload inherent to the academic workplace. In particular, we highlight the need to be aware of the risks to well-being that affect both the physical and mental health of employees. Related to this, RESET focuses on the need for policies that address work life balance to affect the structures, cultures, and practices of the organisation (Lewis & Beauregard, 2018). In academia, this also means looking at the systemic demands on academics and the understanding of scientific excellence.



Striving for gender equity also means sharing care work within families and leaving access to paid work open to all. At the same time, there are obstacles, due to the still insufficient acceptance and support for care work by men, whether cultural, institutional or personal (Koslowski & O'Brien, 2022; Moran & Koslowski, 2019). Accordingly, there is often a lack of role models and models that offer orientation and show that there are other forms in which the division of care work and co-parenting are possible.

Another dimension refers to the care for partners and elders. Often suddenly, the need to care for a relative or partner can arise. This is connected to a high degree of emotional stress and uncertainty. It also implies logistical issues, and the reconciliation of work and care must be balanced. In RESET, we emphasise the importance of institutions supporting their employees in these care tasks and difficult times. This support represents an active contribution to the promotion of work-life balance. In this context, the support can help to reduce the gender care gap.

The "ideal academic norm"

In the academic environment, several interrelated challenges create a complex and often overwhelming landscape, particularly for parents. Academia is characterised by a high-pressure environment with elevated expectations for research productivity, teaching excellence, and service. These demands often necessitate long work hours and significant personal sacrifices, creating a culture where the boundary between work and personal life is increasingly blurred (Minnotte, 2021). Although academic positions offer some flexibility and autonomy—such as the ability to control work schedules and work from home—this flexibility can paradoxically reinforce the expectation of overwork, further intensifying the challenges faced by academic professionals.

Central to this high-pressure environment is the *ideal-worker norm*, a cultural expectation within academia that faculty members should prioritise their professional roles above all else. This norm demands total devotion to work, often at the expense of personal and family life. The pressure to conform to this ideal is compounded by the tenure-track system, which imposes a strict timeline for achieving tenure, usually within six years. Success in this system heavily depends on research achievements, adding further stress, particularly for those balancing professional and family responsibilities.

These interconnected pressures are exacerbated by gendered expectations that mirror broader societal inequalities. Women, especially mothers, are disproportionately affected, facing greater challenges in balancing their professional and family lives. They are more likely to experience feelings of guilt, regret, and increased domestic labour, making it difficult for them to compete equally with their male counterparts (Minnotte, 2021). This dynamic is further complicated by the persistence of work-family conflict and gender inequality, which impact both male and female academic parents. However, women often bear the brunt of these issues, experiencing more maternal discrimination, motherhood-wage penalties, and a higher likelihood of exiting the labour force.



The ideal-worker norm not only perpetuates these gender disparities but also significantly disadvantages parents as a whole, particularly mothers, who are expected to juggle caregiving responsibilities alongside the rigorous demands of their academic careers. The tenure-track system, with its rigid timeline and high expectations across teaching, research, and service, further intensifies these challenges. For many academic parents, this probationary period coincides with their prime childbearing years, creating a difficult balancing act between professional success and family life.

Even when policies such as parental leave are in place, their utilisation often comes with stigma, leading to inconsistent experiences among faculty members. While some receive support, others face discouragement and lack of assistance, resulting in varied impacts on their careers. This inconsistency reflects broader structural challenges within academia, where policies meant to support work-life balance are not always effectively implemented.

In response to these pressures, many academic parents, particularly mothers, resort to strategies like rigorous time management, working during early mornings and late nights, and sacrificing leisure time to meet the demands of their careers. While these strategies may temporarily alleviate some pressures, they often lead to stress, exhaustion, and burnout, perpetuating the cycle of overwork and reinforcing the high-pressure environment that defines academia (Minnotte, 2021).

Work Life Balance and Work Life Conflict

Work-life balance and **work-life conflict** represent two distinct perspectives on the facilitation and reconciliation between the demands of professional and personal lives. There are no clear definitions of both concepts, but a multitude of perspectives towards work and life articulation in literature. WLB hereby is being used as the most common umbrella term, referring to work-life reconciliation. Understanding these concepts is crucial, particularly in the academic context, where the pressures of professional commitments often intersect with personal responsibilities, creating significant challenges.

- **Work-life balance** refers to the reconciliation of professional and personal life demands. It is achieved when individuals can effectively manage their roles and responsibilities in both spheres, ensuring that their personal lives, which include domestic tasks, caregiving, education, and leisure, align with their professional obligations without creating tension or conflict. Achieving this balance means being able to fulfil work responsibilities while still having the time, energy, and resources for personal pursuits. This equilibrium is often supported by institutional and societal structures that facilitate a fair distribution of time and energy across both domains. In an ideal scenario, work-life balance allows individuals to



thrive in their professional roles while maintaining a fulfilling personal life (Rosa, 2021).

- **Work-life conflict** highlights a more challenging reality, where the demands of professional life intrude on personal time, leading to friction and stress (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). This conflict arises when work responsibilities, particularly in high-pressure environments like academia, extend beyond traditional working hours and begin to encroach on personal life spaces (Garraio et al., 2022). The blurring of boundaries between work and home is a common feature of modern professional life, and in academia, it is often exacerbated by expectations of constant productivity, long hours, and the pressure to achieve tenure.

Work-life conflict is shaped by institutional practices and societal norms that often prioritise professional success over personal well-being. This conflict is further complicated by the intersection of various social inequalities, including gender, class, and family status. For example, women in academia frequently face additional pressures due to societal expectations around caregiving and domestic responsibilities, making it even more difficult to achieve a work-life balance. These gendered expectations mean that women are more likely to experience work-life conflict, as they are often expected to juggle both professional responsibilities and a disproportionate share of domestic labour.



The perspective on work-life conflict is particularly important in the academic context because it underscores the challenges that many faculty members face in trying to meet the high demands of their profession while also maintaining a fulfilling personal life. In academia, the expectation to work beyond traditional hours, attend evening and weekend events, and constantly produce research can lead to significant work-life conflict. This is especially true for those who also have caregiving responsibilities, as the demands of academia often conflict with the time and energy required for family life. Addressing work-life conflict is essential for promoting gender equality in academia. Without recognizing and mitigating the sources of this conflict, institutions risk perpetuating a culture where only those who can devote themselves entirely to their work—often at the expense of their personal lives—are able to succeed. This disproportionately affects women and other marginalised groups who are more likely to bear the brunt of domestic responsibilities.



4. Impact Assessment – Evaluation of Measures conducted during RESET in GEP-implementing institutions, and experiences by mentoring partners

The issue of work-life conflict is deeply embedded in academic environments, affecting staff and students alike, and is critical to fostering a culture of equality and well-being within higher education institutions (HEIs). These challenges are closely tied to gender equality, career progression, and institutional culture. Academic norms, such as the "ideal worker" expectation, place significant pressure on both male and female academics, with women disproportionately affected due to caregiving responsibilities. The systemic assumption that women are primarily responsible for caregiving, alongside career-related obstacles like limited leadership opportunities, contributes to a persistent gender imbalance. Furthermore, men with caregiving duties also struggle in a system that rarely accommodates these responsibilities for any gender. Early-career researchers, especially during the postdoctoral phase, face additional stress as they juggle precarious roles and caregiving during critical career-building years, increasing the risk of burnout.

Similarly, student caregivers, particularly parents, face the dual burden of managing academic and personal responsibilities. This often leads to "time poverty" and role conflict, with student parents, especially mothers, spending significant time on caregiving. Institutional barriers, such as rigid course schedules and inadequate support services, intensify these challenges, resulting in isolation and a lack of institutional understanding. To create a more inclusive environment for both academics and students with caregiving duties, universities must implement flexible policies, such as remote learning options, flexible deadlines, and accessible childcare facilities.

The following impact assessment is based on the analysis of various measures and outputs of the RESET project and the institutions involved in it. The following chapter analyses, on the one hand, how the aforementioned challenges around work-life balance in the GEPs 1.0 were taken into account in RESET's GEP-implementing institutions and, on the other hand, which measures were developed to address them and provide institutional solutions. Since the GEPs are constantly evolving in dialogue with the needs of the university communities, the study also analyses the needs identified by the communities in the 2.0 surveys and how they are relevant to the development of the GEPs 2.0 and the measures included for this purpose. This is supplemented by the analysis of contributions to the RESET media campaign FACES OF CAMPUS and its digital exhibition WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS (2023), which was dedicated to the reconciliation of work, study, family, and leisure. In addition, the references to questions of reconciling family and career that were identified in the analysis of RESET's workshops with women in leadership positions are included (Niebel, 2024a).



4.1. Measures in RESET GEPs 1.0

The development of the GEPs 1.0 (2022) within the RESET project has explicitly taken up measures that relate to family friendly policies and work-life balance. In the creation of GEP 1.0, results and findings from the first set of co-designing sessions in work package 6 (Acting Upon Governance), carried out in 2021 and 2022 with members of the RESET teams and female scientists as well as with human resources staff were incorporated. Annex 1 provides an overview of the measures and goals in the respective GEPs 1.0 that address aspects of work-life balance and family friendliness. These are categorised according to the GEP-implementing university. Based on the description of measures in the respective GEPs 1.0 (Annex 1), four priorities can be identified, on which RESET universities have placed a focus in the promotion of work/studies and personal life balance. By categorising these measures, we can better understand the comprehensive strategies deployed by RESET's GEP implementing institutions to enhance gender equality and support employees in managing their work and family lives.

Career progression and reintegration after periods of leave

This category encompasses measures aimed at supporting employees during career transitions, particularly after taking a leave for caregiving, health, or other personal reasons. By prioritising this area, institutions have recognized the importance of providing guidance and resources to facilitate a smooth reintegration into the workplace, and foster their employees' careers after periods of leave. One measure by **UBx** encourages managers to conduct individual interviews before and after long leave periods to discuss career development options, ensuring employees are aware of resources and training opportunities. **UL** emphasises on developing tools to monitor academic performance in correlation with family situations and implement responsive systems for individual needs, such as flexible work arrangements and adjustments to professional responsibilities. **U.Porto** outlines the need to define forms of reintegration after extended absences and promotes a supportive culture that minimises the impact of family care on career progression. They aim to appoint advisors to support employees balancing professional and family responsibilities, enhancing their reintegration experience.

Communication and information

Effective communication as well as ensuring the circulation of information has also been central in most of RESET's institution's GEPs. Raising awareness of rights and available resources that promote work-life balance is crucial to strengthen employee's decision making processes and agency in reconciling work and personal life. This category includes measures focused on disseminating information and providing training to managers and employees. In this context, **AUTH** aims to research childcare needs for university staff and students, thereby informing communication strategies that cater to these specific needs. Notably, this measure in AUTH's GEP 1.0 is the only one that addresses students directly in relation to questions of WLB. **UBx** puts an emphasis on communication actions that highlight rights and tools for managing work-life balance. In this regard,



RESET's Media Campaign is referred to as one action, focusing specifically on balancing professional life with parenthood. Also **U.Porto** emphasises the dissemination of information regarding work-family reconciliation rights and appoints dedicated personnel to advise and support employees in managing these responsibilities.

Flexibilization of work time and place

Initiatives aimed at providing flexible working arrangements that can help employees better balance their professional and personal lives have also been identified in three of the GEPs. Institutions are exploring various strategies to implement flexibility in work hours and locations. **AUTH** proposes flexible and remote work adjustments for staff with caregiving responsibilities, aligning these proposals with applicable legislation. **U.Porto** promotes flexible working times and locations as well, while highlighting the need of ensuring equal access to these arrangements across different units (faculties and research centres). **UL** is working towards implementing systems that adapt to individual family situations, providing flexible work options tailored to specific needs.

Awareness raising

Raising awareness about factors of gender equality in relation to the distribution of family responsibilities has also been essential in some of RESET's GEPs 1.0. This category includes measures designed to foster understanding and challenge stereotypes related to caregiving roles for creating a supportive environment. In this regard, **AUTH** emphasised the need to create a more family friendly environment for caregivers by ensuring the provision of facilities, such as lactation rooms, and activities for children during university events. **U.Porto** addressed awareness-raising campaigns as a measure to highlight the effects of gender stereotypes on family responsibilities, actively promoting equal participation in caregiving roles.

4.2. Assessing the implementation of measures and facilities at RESET Institutions

In the context of RESET's Gender Equality Plans, GEP 1.0 laid the foundation for family-friendly policies and work-life balance measures, such as flexible working arrangements, parental leave policies, and institutional support for caregiving staff and students. Since the implementation of the first GEPs in 2022, RESET's institutions have already begun to implement several of these policies, including setting up structures for flexible work and promoting career reintegration after caregiving leave.

GEP 2.0 aims to build upon these initial measures by expanding the scope and reach of these initiatives, or by adapting them to the institution's needs.



Institution	Adaptation of measures from GEP 1.0 & further development in GEP 2.0
AUTH	<p>The initial Gender Equality Plan (GEP) of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) included several measures aimed at improving work-life balance and supporting parenting. These measures were designed to address the specific needs of both academic and administrative staff. However, due to institutional challenges, including the expiration of the Gender Equality Committee's term, the full implementation of these measures was hindered.</p> <p>The following key measures were proposed in the initial GEP:</p> <p>Informative Material and Parental Support: The development and distribution of informative materials to raise awareness about the importance of work-life balance and available support services.</p> <p>Flexible and Remote Work Arrangements: The proposal of flexible and remote work adjustments to accommodate the needs of staff with caregiving responsibilities.</p> <p>Childcare Needs Assessment: Research to identify the specific childcare needs of university employees and students.</p> <p>Childcare Facilities during Events: The provision of childcare facilities during major university events.</p> <p>Lactation Rooms: The establishment of lactation rooms in key university buildings.</p> <p>While these measures were well-intentioned, their implementation faced significant challenges. The primary obstacle was the lack of a dedicated Gender Equality Committee to oversee and drive the implementation process. Without a dedicated body to champion these initiatives, they were unable to gain the necessary traction and support.</p> <p>The inclusion of these work-life balance measures in both the initial and revised GEP highlights their importance to AUTH. However, the institutional challenges encountered have delayed their implementation. By addressing the work-life balance needs of its staff, AUTH can create a more supportive and inclusive work environment, ultimately benefiting both individuals and the institution as a whole.</p>
UBx	<p>The University of Bordeaux has developed various communication tools and initiatives focused on balancing parenting and professional life. These efforts include interviews and task forces involving a diverse range of university personnel (men, women, teachers, researchers, and administrative staff) who shared their experiences as working parents. These insights were used to create videos addressing common questions about balancing a career and parenting. The university also created motion designs summarising available support measures and established a dedicated intranet page for family-related information, including social, financial, childcare, health, and single-parent support.</p>



	<p>In addition, the university offers "Meetings of Social Action" webinars during lunch breaks, covering topics such as managing screen time for children and financial support for parents. Collaborating with local associations, these webinars provide practical advice and best practices. A dedicated webpage on "Quality of Life at Work" provides further resources.</p> <p>To support well-being, the university has implemented several HR measures, including maternity, paternity, and parental leave, part-time and home-office options, financial assistance for childcare and other activities. A Charter for the Proper Use of Digital Tools emphasises the importance of respecting work-life balance, such as avoiding emails outside working hours and respecting the right to disconnect.</p> <p>The University also initiated a project to combat sedentary lifestyles, implementing activities such as treasure hunts, ergonomic office furniture trials, and lunchtime physical activity classes. These initiatives, which have proven successful on one campus, will be expanded to other campuses. In GEP 2.0, the university plans to continue promoting WLB through the dissemination of content and webinars related to parenthood and family support.</p>
UL	<p>The implementation of GEP 1.0 measures is in progress. The lack of formal policies and strategies hinders the implementation of planned actions. The evaluation of the GEP 1.0 provides an opportunity to recognise the situation using applied metrics and to plan further steps. The collected data will be used to create the strategic directions for the next years.</p> <p>A team for combining professional and family roles was established at the University of Lodz, which is working on introducing research and identifying good practices in this area. Last year, the team organised a panel for employees during which it was possible to discuss experiences and possible solutions to work-life imbalance.</p> <p>Work-life balance is an important issue for the University of Lodz. The GEP 2.0 document will include a reference to this area. This is related to the needs of the community expressed, among others, through the established task force dealing with these issues. WLB is also the need to take into account the expectations of the different generations working at the University of Lodz, who face the challenges of the disturbed balance between the private and professional spheres. At the time of filling in the questionnaire, the specific indicators had not yet been decided. Some of them will be adapted from GEP1.0.</p>
U.Porto	<p>U.Porto has made significant progress in implementing the measures outlined in their GEP 1.0 to promote WLB. A key achievement has been the dissemination of mechanisms to ensure equal access to flexible working hours across different academic and administrative units, ensuring that all employees have the opportunity to balance their professional and personal responsibilities. Additionally, the university has actively disseminated information on work-family reconciliation rights (to various internal</p>



	<p>stakeholders, enhancing awareness of available support. This initiative is maintained in GEP 2.0, U.Porto has an online portal devoted to WL Balance issues and this portal is constantly being disseminated to staff.</p> <p>To provide direct assistance in close proximity, U.Porto has appointed a dedicated service/person to advise and support employees in managing their professional and family care responsibilities. This ensures staff have access to personalised guidance on balancing work and caregiving duties. The university has also fostered partnerships with care provision structures to offer support for both child and elder care, helping employees navigate the logistics of caregiving.</p> <p>U.Porto has organised awareness-raising campaigns to address the effects of gender stereotypes in the distribution of household and family responsibilities. The FACES OF CAMPUS media campaign, part of this initiative, visually promotes caregiving roles for both men and women, challenging traditional gender roles and encouraging a more balanced approach to family care.</p> <p>Further actions on WLB have been initiated: U.Porto is evaluating the implications of further use of flexible working time and location, aiming to introduce greater flexibility in work schedules and remote working options to better support employees' personal and family needs. On GEP 2.0 a close monitoring (via data) of the usage of flexible time and place is foreseen. U.Porto is also working on GEP 2.0 on the definition of an internal status for people who care for others both in the case of students and of staff that will allow these people to use specific benefits (e.g. flexible schedule; priority in chosen classes schedules). Other measures to be included in the new GEP encompass training of leadership on this topic and the mapping of child and elder care structures near U.Porto different campuses. Partnerships with these structures will be sought to make them available to the U.Porto community.</p>
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Figure 6: Adaptation of measures from GEP 1.0 and further development in GEP 2.0

4.3. Reconciliation of work and care duties in RESET institutions – RESET Survey 2.0

Between November 2023 and March 2024 RESET's GEP-implementing institutions, AUTH, UBx, UL and U.Porto have conducted a survey among their employees, in order to assess and monitor the development of GEPs and identify the essential needs, challenges and barriers to design the institutions' GEP 2.0. The survey template was co-designed and developed at the consortium level and local adaptations were prepared by the corresponding RESET teams.

The survey was structured in four sections:



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SciencesPo

- Socio-Demographic Information
- General Impact
- Specific Impact
- Future GEP

The *socio-demographic information* (see annex 2) aimed to give a better frame for the answers, the *general impact* targeted to evaluate the perception of the GEP and its implementation. *Specific impact* went deeper into the assessment of specific measures of the GEP. As the GEPs vary throughout the RESET institutions, this aspect also needed to be adapted locally and for the main areas, two measures were selected and assessed. *Future GEP* aimed to collect priority areas, target groups and measure proposals. On this section we retrieved the data that inform better this toolbox, i.e. the perceptions gathered in terms of the work life balance measures implemented thus far and the ones that should be addressed in the future

At **AUTH**, the survey gained insights on the GEP measures, particularly regarding recruitment, retention, career progression, and family-friendly policies. A significant portion of the respondents (85.9%) believes that providing equal career opportunities is a key factor in promoting gender equality and diversity within the institution. Measures related to career progression, such as the introduction of quotas and the requirement for reports justifying the non-selection of female candidates, were also considered impactful. While progress has been made in some areas, GEP 2.0 will as a consequence emphasise further inclusion in career progression, acknowledging the constraints imposed by public university regulations in Greece. *Family-friendly policies* were highlighted in this context, especially as part of broader efforts to enhance equality and work-life balance.

Based on the survey results at **UBx**, the key priorities for the next Gender Equality Plan (GEP) include engaging men as allies for gender equality, combating discrimination, *improving work-life balance*, and addressing recruitment and career advancement. Additionally, the organisation of *working hours and time management, such as part-time and flexible hourly arrangements*, are highly valued by the community and considered important for fostering a family-friendly environment. These aspects, particularly work-life balance, will be given special emphasis in GEP 2.0 to enhance inclusivity and support for staff.

The top priorities identified for the next GEP identified in **UL**'s survey include *work-life balance*, combating discrimination, general policies, gender-inclusive communication, and awareness-raising training. Key measures to achieve these priorities include offering additional training and workshops, *implementing top-down regulations to promote a healthy work-life balance*, and introducing inclusive language in both official and informal communication. The results of UL's survey also emphasise on work-life balance, highlighting the community's desire for policies that better integrate professional and personal life.



Especially at **U.Porto** the Report on Survey 2.0 reveals that many participants view *work-life balance as a key area* that needs further attention in the upcoming Gender Equality Plan (GEP) 2.0. When asked to select priority topics, work-life balance was the most frequently mentioned, with 167 mentions. Other important areas included combating stereotype-based discrimination (124 mentions), recruitment and career progression (96 mentions), and the university's general policies (92 mentions). The strong emphasis on work-life balance highlights its significance in creating a more family-friendly and supportive environment.

Additionally, U.Porto's survey report gives insights into measures that were highlighted by respondents in order to foster WLB and family-friendliness at their university. Regarding *recruitment and career progression*, respondents emphasised that performance evaluations should not discriminate against parents, and human resources processes should be inclusive of gender, age, origin, and other factors. Transparency in career progression data, the implementation of gender quotas, and offering flexible contract terms are highlighted as important steps. Additionally, training on gender equality, diversity, and disabilities is recommended, with strong encouragement for participation.

In terms of *work-life balance and organisational culture*, several family-friendly measures were proposed, such as reinforcing parental support, providing childcare options, implementing a 35-hour workweek or a four-day workweek, and promoting remote working at least two days per week. Other suggestions include flexible scheduling without salary penalties, limiting meetings and emails to certain hours, and creating systems to support staff with caregiving responsibilities. The report also advocates for reducing workload by hiring more staff and improving the university's conciliation portal to better support work-family balance.

4.4. Further Involvement of RESET communities: Results of Workshops and RESETs Media Campaign

4.4.1. Workshops with women in leadership positions (2023)

Between May and July of 2023, co-design workshops were held at four universities within the RESET consortium (UBx, U.Porto, RUB, UOULU). These workshops involved twenty women holding leadership and decision-making roles across various disciplines, including Humanities, Social Sciences, STEM, and Medicine, spanning C-Grade to A-Grade positions in academia, as well as top management roles in administration and research. The primary goal of these workshops was to explore strategies for increasing the number of women in leadership positions and committees. For more information on the design, and results of the workshop, see Niebel (2024a).



Work Family Balance/Parental leave

The workshops held across the four universities (UBx, U.Porto, RUB, OULU) highlighted the challenges in balancing family responsibilities with academic and leadership roles, especially for women. Key issues identified included institutional pressures during parental leave and the negative impact of motherhood on career progression. Participants shared specific concerns about the lack of alignment between parental leave policies and the demands of a scientific career, as well as the broader struggles with work-life balance (WLB) and leadership responsibilities, such as caring for relatives.

To address these challenges, participants of the workshop recommended that performance evaluations should account for parental leave as equivalent to a sabbatical year and emphasised the need for promoting gender awareness through visual materials and workshops. Furthermore, the challenges of caregiving, and WLB were addressed. Thus, the deployment of WLB policies aimed at men, such as parental and paternity leave were emphasised, as well as the importance of a "right to disconnect" to support WLB. Additionally, the need to address the Gender Care Gap and the importance of integrating family-friendly practices into leadership roles were discussed.

Overall, the workshops highlighted that achieving work-life balance, particularly for women in leadership, are crucial. Recommendations include integrating family considerations into career planning, promoting gender awareness, and ensuring that parental leave is adequately recognized in performance assessments.

4.4.2. RESET's Media Campaign *FACES OF CAMPUS* and its exhibition *WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS* (2023)

In RESET's Media Campaign, *FACES OF CAMPUS*, the digital exhibition *WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS* was dedicated to the institution's spaces and initiatives, dedicated to the promotion of well-being at work and in studies. Contributions from all RESET institutions highlighted different aspects of work- and study-life-balance, and family-related factors in particular. By this, the campaign provides insightful resources to be analysed, as they give insights into how researchers and support staff negotiate work-life balance in our institutions. From all the contributions collected we will highlight and further analyse the "weekly schedules" developed by UOULU's task force on parenting, which has been established through RESET, and RUB's staff unit 'Family Friendly University'.



Weekly Schedules

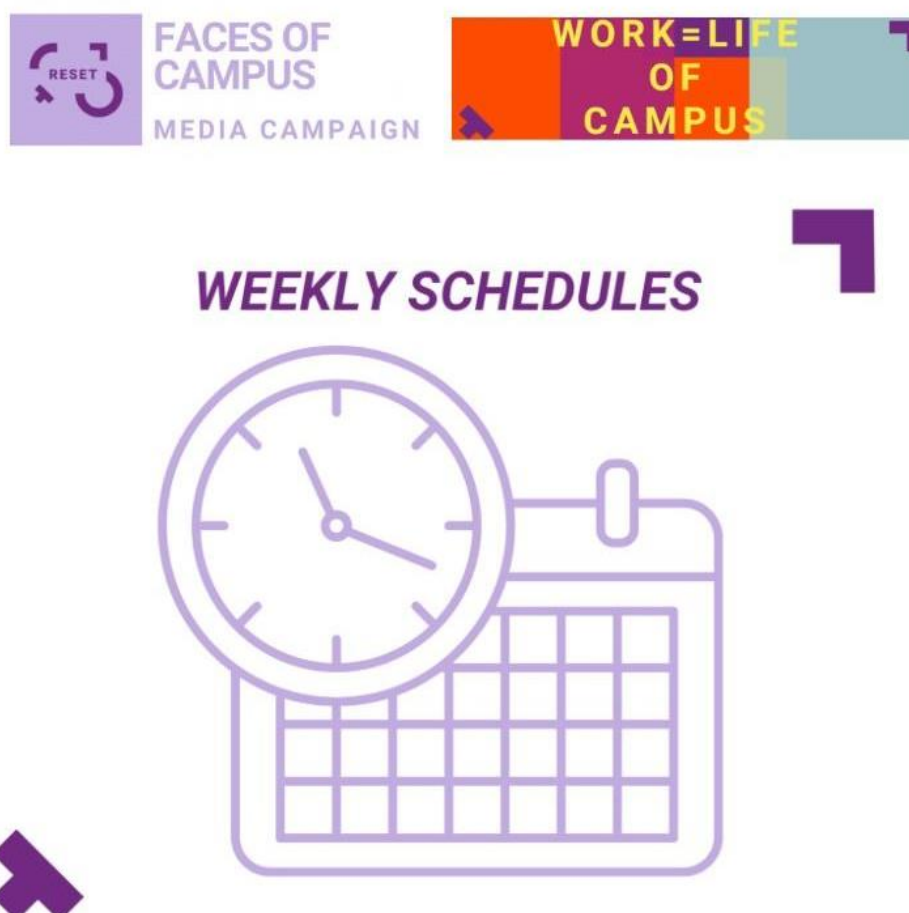


Figure 7: Weekly Schedules in RESET's Media Campaign "FACES OF CAMPUS"

"Weekly Schedules" were one element of the exhibition WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS, that was launched as the second element of RESET's Media Campaign FACES OF CAMPUS. They provided an ideal typical weekly schedule based on the experiences and lived realities of its creators, featuring scientists, teachers and researchers as well as PhD Students, mostly with care responsibilities. In addition to the schedule, we asked the participants to answer two to three guiding questions of their choice, in which they could briefly explain their schedule (Annex 3).

Guiding questions:

- To what extent is this your typical weekly schedule? Are there more frequent variations?
- What do you find particularly challenging about your weekly schedule?



- How do you draw motivation and strength from your week?
- What important events or people could not find a place in the timeline?
- How do you arrange time periods and tasks with other people (e.g. partners, family members, colleagues or friends)?
- Is there anything you would like to change about your weekly schedule?

To gain deeper insights into how our contributors navigate their work-life negotiations, their responses to the guiding questions provide valuable perspectives that we summarise next.

Reflections

The seven “Weekly Schedules” collected illustrated how many different tasks need to find their place in a tight schedule. For most contributors, the day starts early, and many of them bring their children to school or kindergarten, before their workday begins. For most of our contributors (here referred to as P1-P7), work continues also after conventional working hours, after spending quality time with their family and doing household chores. However, some contributors also have time reserved for recreational activities during the weekdays.

Workload and Time Management

Managing multiple work tasks and responsibilities is a significant challenge for many contributors. The first contributor from UBx (P1) articulates how the combination of various roles in a single day leads to high energy expenditure, particularly during the academic year, which she likens to a marathon. With little time for regeneration, vacation periods become crucial moments for her to recharge and spend quality time with her family. Despite these efforts, she occasionally feels guilty for not dedicating as much time to her children as part-time working mothers do. Similarly, P2 (UBx) emphasizes the difficulty of reconciling various work tasks alongside family commitments and household chores. The density of her weekly schedule requires careful prioritization of time, and she expresses a desire to reduce her workload for a slower pace of life.

P3 (UL) tries to reserve her weekends for family, but she often finds herself working on Sunday evenings to prepare for the upcoming week. The challenge of avoiding work-related tasks during her personal time is a common struggle for her, as she frequently dedicates her evenings to administrative duties and communication with colleagues and students. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, she has made a conscious effort to carve out family time, though maintaining friendships has proven difficult. P4 (UL) notes that her work structure and routines shift significantly based on family illnesses or approaching deadlines. While she values the flexibility of working from home, she faces the challenge of separating her work hours from her caregiving responsibilities, which can blur the



boundaries between the two. P6 (U.Porto) finds it particularly challenging to balance leisure and working time, often feeling mentally divided between personal and professional obligations. Yet, they draw strength from their ability to motivate themselves to navigate these demands effectively. P7 (RUB) echoes the sentiment of overwhelming schedules, expressing that he often lacks time for family and friends during the week. Coordinating care responsibilities with partners, grandparents, and babysitters requires extensive communication, further complicating his ability to find balance.

Motivation and Personal Satisfaction

Amidst these challenges, sources of motivation and personal fulfilment play a vital role in maintaining a sense of purpose. P1 (UBx) finds strength in her work, driven by recognition from students and colleagues. Her engagement in projects aimed at improving study conditions enhances her motivation, even as she struggles to prioritise her research and publication activities. For P2 (UBx), the versatility of her work serves as a motivational factor, even though managing multiple tasks can be tiring. She underscores the importance of getting enough sleep to maintain her health, yet she longs for more time with friends and extended family. P4 (UL) derives great satisfaction from her teaching and the positive interpersonal relationships she cultivates at work. Although successfully balancing work and family tasks remains an ideal rather than a frequent reality, she strives to appreciate even the smallest positive moments in her daily life. P5 (U.Porto) shares the importance of dividing care tasks with her partner, which provides her with a sense of motivation. She enjoys her work and feels a sense of self-efficacy, but she yearns for at least two free evenings each week to focus on herself. P6 (U.Porto) relies on self-motivation as a powerful tool to tackle the everyday challenges of balancing work and family life, seeing this internal drive as a significant advantage in managing their responsibilities.

Family and Care Responsibilities

Family and caregiving responsibilities are central to the experiences of these contributors. P1(UBx) acknowledges the guilt she feels for not spending as much time with her children compared to part-time working mothers. Nonetheless, she appreciates that academic holidays provide opportunities for family bonding. P2 (UBx) also emphasises the need to juggle family relationships and household duties alongside her professional tasks, revealing how these responsibilities contribute to her overall sense of fatigue. P5 (U.Porto) highlights the significance of coordinating care tasks with her partner, noting the challenge of finding moments of rest amidst their busy schedules. This coordination is essential for maintaining a balanced family life. P4 (U.Porto) points out how her work routines are influenced by family illnesses and impending deadlines, illustrating the ways in which personal circumstances can impact professional responsibilities. P7 (RUB) shares the difficulties of lacking time for family and friends, which can lead to diminished quality of life and personal well-being, including the quality of meals prepared at home.

Social Connections and Support



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Social connections and support systems are crucial for maintaining a healthy work-life balance. P3 (UL) recognizes that her busy schedule has affected her friendships, leading to a sense of isolation in her personal life. For P4 (UL), the social aspects of work and the development of good interpersonal relationships contribute significantly to her happiness, even amidst the challenges she faces in balancing her responsibilities. P6 (U.Porto) reflects on the difficulty of maintaining boundaries between work and leisure, which further affects social interactions and personal time. Finally, P7 (RUB) notes that the demands of his schedule leave little room for friends and family, impacting his overall quality of life and contributing to a sense of disconnection from his social circle. These narratives illustrate the complex interplay between work, family care, and personal satisfaction, highlighting the challenges faced by individuals striving to achieve a harmonious work-life balance.

Contributions by UOULU's task force on parenting

At UOULU, the members of the task force for parenting shared personal experiences on research mobility, caregiving responsibilities, and work life balance, contributing to the exposition "WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS".

Research Mobility and Parenting Challenges

This contribution highlights the dual nature of research mobility for parenting academics. While research mobility is often seen as a benefit in academic careers, allowing for personal and professional growth, it can also be a significant burden for parents. The task force members from UOULU shared personal experiences where mobility provided opportunities for family involvement during research visits, but also discussed the challenges when family members, particularly partners and children, could not accompany them. Research visits offer enriching experiences, with some academics able to bring their families along, creating a unique opportunity for shared experiences abroad. However, when family members cannot travel, the division of caregiving responsibilities at home becomes unequal, increasing stress for the parent left behind. This can lead to feelings of guilt and strain in balancing caregiving and work responsibilities.

The task force emphasised the need for universities to provide structured support for parenting academics, including assistance with visa applications and understanding foreign schooling systems. They advocate for the creation of a dedicated support team to help parenting academics navigate the complexities of long-term research visits.

Work-Life Balance and Caregiving Responsibilities

The second contribution focuses on the challenges faced by academic parents when their children are sick. Members of the task force shared personal accounts of balancing caregiving with academic responsibilities. While flexible working arrangements, such as



working from home, are appreciated, they often lead to exhaustion and feelings of guilt due to reduced productivity.

Many academics express gratitude for the ability to work from home while caring for sick children. In Finland, this flexibility is common, allowing academics to handle work responsibilities while attending to caregiving duties. Despite this flexibility, parents often struggle to balance both roles effectively, leading to fatigue and a sense of being overwhelmed. Tasks are postponed, and work frequently spills into late-night hours, affecting the parents' well-being.

Parents often feel guilty for not being as productive as usual when caring for their children. Some mention the internal conflict of deciding whether to officially take leave for caregiving or continue trying to work while attending to their sick child.

The task force suggests that it may be better for parents to officially take leave when their children are sick, rather than attempting to work while caregiving, to reduce the burden and feelings of guilt.

“Featuring the Staff Unit Family-friendly University”

This contribution to WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS from Ruhr University Bochum (RUB) highlights the comprehensive support provided by the universities' **Staff Unit Family-friendly University**, focusing on the challenges of reconciling work, study, and family life. The unit, established under the Department of Human Resources and Legal Affairs, addresses various logistical and administrative needs related to parental leave, childcare, and caregiving for relatives. The university takes a proactive approach to supporting family life by offering personal counselling, advising on legal aspects of parental leave, and working strategically to foster a family-friendly culture within academia.

RUB addresses family-friendliness by offering practical, flexible childcare solutions, e.g. through the Mobile Child's Room, a rolling chest with childcare essentials like toys, a changing mat, and a cot, which is available in over 30 locations on campus. Furthermore, short-term childcare solutions are provided, where permanent family rooms are not available. Both parental and elder care responsibilities are supported by the unit. The unit's inclusive concept of "family," which encompasses diverse caregiving roles, highlights RUB's holistic approach to reconciling family life with academic demands. The university also recognizes the need for flexible and immediate childcare arrangements and actively works to promote leadership that supports a healthy work-life balance. These measures, combined with low-threshold information services and proactive communication, demonstrate RUB's commitment to making academia more compatible with family and care responsibilities.



4.5. Takeaways

RESET's institutions have implemented through their Gender Equality Plans (GEPs) several measures to promote gender equality and work-life balance in their institutions. Based on the analysis of the GEP 1.0 measures, as well as other actions of the RESET institutions, such as the surveys 2.0 across universities, co-designing sessions with women in leadership positions, and contributions to RESET's media campaign, the project has highlighted critical gaps in gender equality and work-life balance policies.

One major area of focus is career progression and reintegration after leave. RESET institutions have addressed the need for measures to support employees during transitions, especially after parental or caregiver leave. For example, U.Porto advocates for formal reintegration support for returning employees, as actions in their GEP 1.0. This is crucial for ensuring that caregiving responsibilities do not unduly hinder career advancement.

Another priority is effective communication and dissemination of information about work-life balance policies. Institutions like AUTH and U.Porto emphasise the need to raise awareness of available resources and rights. RESET's Media Campaign also focused on the promotion of work-life balance. Institutions recognize that clear communication is needed to empower individuals to make informed decisions about balancing work, studies and personal life, as well as for their career development.

Flexibilization of work time and place has also been highlighted as an essential strategy for fostering work-life balance. Many RESET institutions are working towards offering flexible hours and remote work options to support staff with caregiving responsibilities. For example, U.Porto and UL are implementing flexible work systems tailored to individual family situations.

In terms of raising awareness, several institutions have launched campaigns to challenge stereotypes around caregiving and promote equal participation in family duties. AUTH has taken steps to create a more family-friendly environment by providing facilities like lactation rooms, while U.Porto has launched initiatives to promote the equal sharing of caregiving roles.

RESET's institutional surveys also underscore the importance of work-life balance for fostering gender equality. For instance, at U.Porto, work-life balance was cited as the most critical area for improvement, with respondents advocating for flexible work arrangements, such as a four-day workweek and remote working opportunities. Additionally, other institutions reported the need for career evaluation systems that do not penalise parents or caregivers, along with increased training on gender equality and diversity.

The task force contributions to WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS from UOULU highlight the complex challenges faced by parenting academics in navigating work-life balance. In the case of research mobility, while it presents opportunities for academic and personal growth, it also creates significant challenges for those with caregiving responsibilities,



especially when family members cannot accompany them. The task force advocates for more robust university support to ease these transitions. In the context of caring for sick children, the flexibility of working from home is appreciated, but it often leads to exhaustion and guilt, as parents struggle to balance caregiving with work. The task force suggests that taking official leave during these times may alleviate some of these pressures. Overall, these contributions emphasise the need for better institutional support and policies to address the unique struggles of academic parents.

5. Lessons learnt on Fostering Work/Study-Life Balance at Universities

The previous impact assessment was based on the analysis of various measures and outputs of the RESET project and the institutions involved in it. The following chapter analyses, on the one hand, how the aforementioned challenges around work-life balance in the GEPs 1.0 were taken into account in RESET's GEP-implementing institutions and, on the other hand, which measures were developed to address them and provide institutional solutions. Since the GEPs are constantly evolving in dialogue with the needs of the university communities, the study also analyses the needs identified by the communities in the 2.0 surveys and how they are relevant to the development of the GEPs 2.0 and the measures developed for this purpose. This is supplemented by the analysis of contributions to the RESET media campaign FACES OF CAMPUS and its digital exhibition WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS (2023), which was dedicated to the reconciliation of work, study, family and leisure. In addition, the references to questions of reconciling family and career identified in the analysis of RESET's workshops with women in leadership positions will be incorporated (Niebel, 2024a). Four major lessons learnt were systematised sustaining a group of tools:



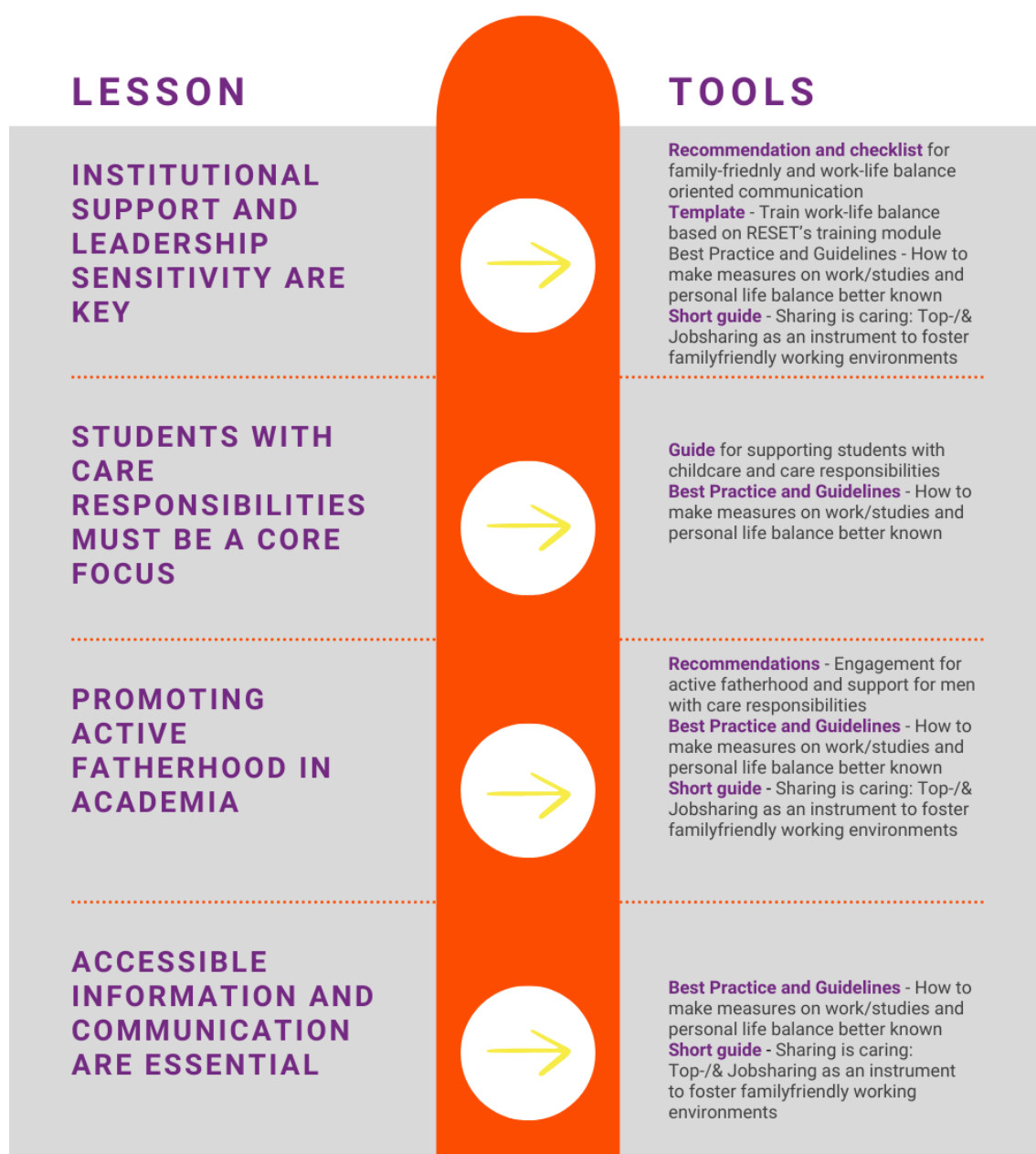


Figure 8: Lessons leading to tools of this toolbox

As the extensive data collection on which this toolbox is based has shown, the collaboration on the RESET project over the past four years has highlighted how central issues around work-life balance, stress reduction, workload, and the ever-present need to balance the multitude of work demands, role expectations, aspirations, and fears at universities are. To address these challenges, universities need to implement flexible policies,



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such as remote work options, flexible teaching schedules, and career reintegration programs for those returning from caregiving leave. Additionally, creating a more inclusive culture that does not penalise academics for taking parental leave or reducing workloads during caregiving periods is critical. This systemic approach, focused on changing institutional practices rather than expecting individuals to adjust, is necessary to ensure equitable opportunities for all academics, regardless of gender or family responsibilities.

While the focus on family responsibilities is central to this, so is the relationship between work demands and the ability to find time to regenerate, to promote health and to find balance. Social relationships here not only affect one's own family, but also friends and other social networks. While studies show that focusing on balancing work and family life does not in itself make a significant contribution to gender equality, we see that the importance attached to this topic by employees in the academic sector can make a decisive contribution in the area of career development, especially for women, who are more severely disadvantaged by motherhood and other caring responsibilities.

Work-life balance and work-life conflict are not topics that can be reduced to the field of tension surrounding parenthood. On the one hand, care work cannot be equated with leisure time per se, but rather entails its own stresses and demands. Not only is the upbringing and care of children accompanied by stress and crises, but so is the care of relatives, which not infrequently befalls one as an event and can bring with it psychological, social, temporal and also financial burdens.

The right to rest and leisure is a human right, not a privilege (Sivan & Veal, 2021). However, how leisure time is used and can be perceived, and what spaces and time slots are available for this, is not only related to workload and other obligations, but is deeply intersectional, interwoven with various interrelated categories of inequality (Watson, 2018).

Lesson 1: Institutional Support and Leadership Sensitivity Are Key

Supporting work-life balance, career growth, and reconciliation of responsibilities requires leaders who understand how closely these areas are connected and are sensitive to the challenges involved. As we highlight in RESET's "Joint roadmap on establishing institutional standards and frameworks for recruitment and career promotion towards equality, diversity, and scientific excellence" (Junca et al., 2024), these issues already affect the selection procedures and selection criteria in recruitment processes, especially for leaders in science. As we emphasise in the report "Diversity in gatekeeping positions: lessons learnt and guidelines" (Niebel 2024a), this means, in particular, effecting institutional change by having leaders demonstrate gender and diversity sensitivity in recruitment interviews. This can be achieved, for example, by explicitly asking candi-



dates about their experience in promoting work-life balance in previous roles, about challenges in the academic world in reconciling family and career, and about plans for promoting these in their new role.

In addition, close career support and advice for employees is needed, which is particularly sensitive to issues of reconciliation and work-life balance. This concerns supervisors on the one hand, and further support programs at the institutional level on the other. As Barbara Eversole and Cindy Crowder (2020) point out in their article, it has to be possible to have both, a successful academic career as well as a fulfilling life outside of work. Human Resource Development (HRD) interventions hereby play a crucial role. On an individual level, these interventions consist of supporting career development initiatives, mentoring, networking, formal support groups, committees and forums centred around the advancement of women in academia.

On the level of departments, work-life policies need to be well known by department chairs, who should also act as role models, and be in exchange with employees in order to support them. Here also flexibility regarding teaching assignments, teaching load and schedules should be discussed.

→ **Linked tools: Tool #1, Tool #4, Tool #5, Tool #6**

Lesson 2: Students with Care Responsibilities Must Be a Core Focus

Universities must recognize that a significant portion of their student population—up to one-fourth in many institutions—has caregiving responsibilities. These students, often juggling jobs alongside full-time studies, face immense time constraints that reduce their ability to engage in academic and social activities. The challenges for student parents, especially mothers, are compounded by the lack of institutional flexibility in course schedules, deadlines, and support services such as childcare facilities on campus. As a result, student caregivers experience "time poverty" and role conflict, which can negatively impact their academic performance and mental well-being, leading to increased stress, isolation, and a higher risk of dropping out.

To mitigate these risks, universities must prioritise flexible study options, including online courses, hybrid learning models, extended deadlines, and alternative assessment formats tailored to caregiving students. Providing accessible and affordable on-campus childcare facilities would also offer practical support to these students. Moreover, it is critical that universities foster a more supportive institutional culture where student caregivers feel comfortable disclosing their caregiving responsibilities without fear of being judged as less committed. Addressing these needs not only supports individual student



success but also promotes equity and inclusion across the student body, ensuring that those with caregiving duties can thrive in academic life.

→ **Linked tools: Tool #2**

Lesson 3: Promoting Active Fatherhood in Academia

Active fatherhood remains a challenge in 2024, with universities often focusing their initiatives around motherhood. This not only reinforces traditional gender roles, where women are seen as the primary caregivers, but also creates bias that hinders fathers from claiming their caregiving time and roles. Institutions must actively promote and support active fatherhood by addressing caregiving in policies and explicitly including fatherhood in institutional discourse. This includes revising visual communication to depict caregiving roles in a more inclusive manner, showing both fathers and mothers with children. Addressing implicit biases and ensuring that fathers feel equally entitled to caregiving leave and flexibility is critical to achieving true gender equality.

→ **Linked tools: Tool #3, Tool #5, Tool #6**

Lesson 4: Accessible Information and Communication Are Essential

Support services and information regarding parental leave, caregiving for relatives, and other work-life balance resources must be easily accessible to all university members, including both students and staff. This means providing clear and readily available information on institutional websites, intranets, and through direct communication with staff in advisory roles. Leadership must be knowledgeable about these resources and trained to support employees in navigating their rights and obligations. Additionally, institutional communication should avoid focusing solely on mothers and women, instead using inclusive language and visuals that address all genders. For students, it is essential that support services related to work-life balance are easy to find and understand, ensuring that caregiving students can fully access the help they need.

→ **Linked tools: Tool #6**



6. Tools: Implementing actions towards work/studies and personal life balance

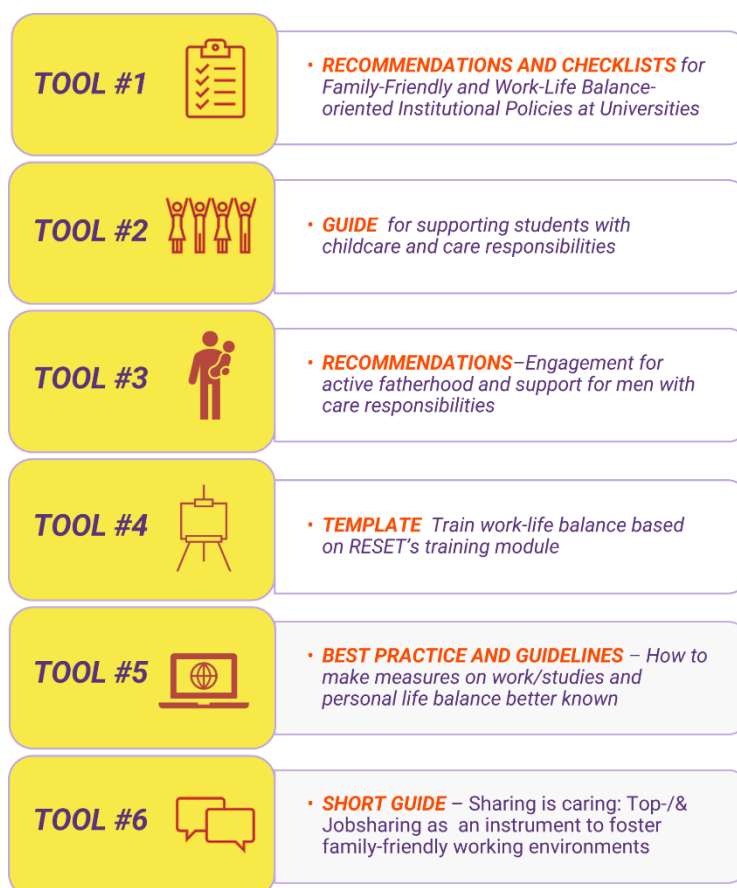


Figure 9: Overview of Tools in this toolbox



TOOL #1: Recommendations and Checklist for Family-Friendly and Work-Life Balance-Oriented Institutional Policies at Universities

This tool provides a set of recommendations and a checklist for developing and implementing family-friendly and work-life balance (WLB)-oriented policies at universities. It integrates proven strategies, such as career-life planning and time-banking systems, and provides guidance on fostering an institutional culture that supports work-life balance for all members of the academic community, regardless of gender or family responsibilities. The recommendations emphasize the need for flexibility, support, and recognition of caregiving roles, while ensuring transparency and equality in how these policies are applied.

It is designed to help universities implement policies that promote family-friendly environments and work-life balance for faculty, staff, and students. Drawing on insights from Human Resource Development (HRD) interventions and research by Barbara Eversole and Cindy Crowder (2020), as well as measures promoted by RESET's sister project TARGET (2021), this checklist is structured at three levels: individual, departmental, and institutional. Each level outlines key policies and actions to support an academic culture where both a fulfilling career and personal life are possible.

This tool is inspired by TARGET's deliverable #(2021) and based on the results of RESET's lessons learnt on the need to foster Work Life Balance on different levels at the institutions.



Recommendations:

Integrated Career-Life Planning for Academic Staff

Implement a structured career-life planning process that allows faculty members to align their personal and professional goals, creating a more balanced and sustainable career path. This three-step process involves:

- ➔ **Self-reflection:** Provide an online guide where faculty members can anonymously assess their career goals, work-life balance preferences, and flexibility needs. Encourage them to rethink traditional work-life balance approaches and consider possibilities for greater flexibility in academia.
- ➔ **Coaching:** Offer one-on-one sessions with trained coaches to discuss the self-reflection results. Coaches can guide faculty in identifying specific strategies for integrating personal and professional responsibilities.
- ➔ **Team Leader Support:** Equip team leaders with the necessary training to discuss flexible working options with faculty members and to explore individual solutions tailored to the needs of their teams. This step ensures that leaders are aware of available institutional support mechanisms and can create an inclusive environment where work-life balance is prioritised.

Implement a Time-Banking System

Introduce a time-banking system that rewards academic staff for activities that promote team flexibility and institutional success, particularly those that are often overlooked or uncompensated. Time-banking not only encourages a collaborative work environment but also addresses the imbalance in service roles typically undertaken by women.

Key elements include:

- ➔ **Earning Credits:** Faculty can earn credits for activities such as mentoring, covering for colleagues, or serving on committees. These credits can be used to "buy back time" in the form of either home support (housecleaning, childcare) or work-related support (manuscript editing, public speaking coaching).
- ➔ **Transparent Tracking:** Maintain a transparent, participatory process for tracking earned credits using an online platform. This ensures that the contributions of all team members are recognized.
- ➔ **Gender Sensitivity:** Recognize that women tend to perform more service and mentoring roles and, therefore, may earn more credits. Ensure that the system does not reinforce gender imbalances but instead provides equitable opportunities for men and women to benefit from the time-banking system.



Promote Gender-Neutral WLB Policies

Ensure that all WLB policies, including parental leave, flexible work options, and career reintegration programs, are gender-neutral. Encourage both men and women to take advantage of these policies to avoid reinforcing traditional gender roles in caregiving. By addressing fathers' participation in caregiving, institutions can challenge stereotypes and promote active fatherhood, which is often under-recognized in academic settings.

Flexible Work Arrangements and Reintegration Programs

Provide flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options and flexible teaching schedules, to accommodate the diverse needs of academic staff with caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, establish robust career reintegration programs for those returning from parental or caregiver leave to ensure that time away from work does not negatively impact career progression.

Regular Feedback and Evaluation

Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of WLB policies through regular feedback from faculty and staff. This can be done via surveys, focus groups, or workshops that allow employees to voice their concerns and suggest improvements. Regular evaluation ensures that policies remain relevant and responsive to the changing needs of the academic community.

Checklist:

Based on the recommendations above, here is a checklist on individual, departmental, and institutional support.

1. Individual Support: Policies to Support Faculty and Staff with Family Responsibilities

- ☑ **Career Development Initiatives:** Offer programs, and actions that actively support the career development of academic staff and faculty with caregiving responsibilities, such as career performance and development consultation meetings with supervisors, skill-building workshops, and leadership training.
- ☑ **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship opportunities, particularly focusing on mid-career faculty, experienced academics, and academic parents. Pair new academic parents with experienced faculty members to provide guidance on career development, and career expectations, as well as balancing academic and family commitments.
- ☑ **Networking Opportunities:** Create or support networking activities for academic parents, such as playgroups, parent-child activities, or information-sharing sessions on childcare resources.



- ☑ **Formal Support Groups:** Form committees, forums, or support groups dedicated to advancing the interests of women and caregivers in academia. These groups can provide both professional guidance and emotional support.
- ☑ **Integrated Career-Life Planning:** Implement a structured career-life planning process that includes self-reflection, one-on-one coaching sessions, and discussions with team leaders to align personal and professional goals. This helps faculty identify flexible work solutions that meet their caregiving needs.

2. Departmental Support: Policies to Enhance Work-Life Balance at the Department Level

- ☑ **Well-Informed Department Chairs:** Ensure department chairs are knowledgeable about university work-life policies and understand their role in fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment.
- ☑ **Department Chairs as Role Models:** Encourage department chairs to lead by example in maintaining work-life balance, demonstrating that personal and professional life can coexist successfully.
- ☑ **Regular Conversations with Employees:** Department chairs should hold regular one-on-one meetings with faculty and staff to discuss their individual work-life balance needs, challenges, and solutions.
- ☑ **Flexible Teaching Assignments:** Allow flexibility in teaching schedules and assignments, such as reduced teaching loads or scheduling classes earlier in the day to accommodate caregiving responsibilities.
- ☑ **Reduced Service Load:** Offer reduced committee and service assignments for faculty and staff with significant caregiving responsibilities to ensure that family obligations do not become career barriers.
- ☑ **Mandatory Training on Work-Life Policies:** Provide department chairs and leadership teams with training and development sessions focused on work-life balance policies to equip them with the tools necessary to support faculty effectively (see also *Tool #4*).

3. Institutional Support: University-Wide Policies for Family-Friendliness and Flexibility

- ☑ **Promotion Systems for Part-Time Faculty:** Develop a promotion system that allows part-time faculty members to be eligible for career advancement, ensuring that part-time status does not hinder long-term career growth.
- ☑ **On-Site Childcare Facilities:** Provide high-quality, on-campus daycare facilities or establish partnerships with local childcare providers to offer accessible and affordable childcare services for faculty, staff, and students (see also *Tool #2*).



- ☑ **Childcare Assistance:** Offer support in finding and coordinating off-campus childcare for those with caregiving responsibilities, especially for young children.
- ☑ **Flexible Teaching Schedules:** Rotate class schedules to provide flexibility, allowing faculty to balance family and professional obligations. Consider offering a mix of morning, afternoon, and online classes to accommodate diverse needs.
- ☑ **Home Office Arrangements:** Implement clear policies that allow for flexible working arrangements, including options for faculty and staff to work from home, especially for those with caregiving responsibilities.
- ☑ **Extended Leave Options:** Allow faculty and staff to take extended leaves, including multi-year sabbaticals, for personal or professional reasons without jeopardizing their career progression.
- ☑ **Sick Leave Donation and Banking:** Enable staff to bank or donate their unused sick leave to colleagues who need extended time off for caregiving or personal health issues (Eversole et al., 2013).
- ☑ **Family-Friendly Event Scheduling:** Ensure that university events, meetings, and other important activities are scheduled between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. to accommodate the schedules of faculty and staff with family responsibilities.

4. Additional Work-Life Balance Measures

- ☑ **Time-Banking System:** Implement a time-banking system where faculty can earn credits for activities that promote team flexibility and institutional success. These credits can be redeemed for home support (housecleaning, childcare) or work-related services (manuscript editing, coaching).
- ☑ **Communication and Accessibility of WLB Policies:** Create a dedicated webpage for all WLB policies and support services, ensuring that they are easily accessible via institutional intranets and websites. Utilize video and motion designs to communicate key policies, ensuring broad awareness and understanding (see also *Tool #5*).
- ☑ **Webinars and Workshops:** Offer regular webinars on relevant WLB topics, such as balancing caregiving and work, financial management for families, or coping with stress. Collaborate with external organizations and experts for these sessions, which should be accessible for both live participation and as replays (see also *Tool#5*).





TOOL #2: Guide for supporting students with child-care and care responsibilities

Universities play a crucial role in ensuring **that students with caregiving responsibilities**, such as those with children or other dependent family members, are supported throughout their academic journey. To make education accessible and inclusive for all, **institutions should provide a range of resources, advice, and services tailored to the needs of students who juggle academic commitments with family care.**

The following guide outlines strategies and initiatives universities can implement, drawing on the example of Ruhr University Bochum (RUB), which emphasizes family-friendly infrastructure and support systems.

1. Creating a Family-Friendly Campus Environment

A family-friendly university needs to prioritize an accessible and supportive campus infrastructure to support students with caregiving responsibilities. Examples of services that could be offered include:

- **On-Campus Childcare Facilities:** Providing accessible, high-quality childcare on or near campus, including nurseries and kindergartens, allows students to attend classes and focus on their studies without worrying about childcare arrangements.
- **Family-Friendly Infrastructure:** The campus should be equipped with family-friendly spaces such as lactation rooms, diaper-changing facilities, and parent



lounges where students with children can rest or attend to their family needs. These rooms need to be accessible to all genders.

- **Parent Networks:** Establishing parent networks on campus encourages peer support, resource sharing, and social interaction among students with similar caregiving challenges. These networks can help build a community that understands the unique difficulties faced by student parents.

2. Counselling and Advisory Services for Students with Care Responsibilities

Students with children or other care responsibilities often face unique pressures related to balancing their studies and family life. Universities should offer targeted counselling and advisory services to assist these students in managing their obligations:

- **Psychological and Social Counselling:** Providing psychological and social support is essential for students facing overwhelming responsibilities. Universities should offer counselling services to help students navigate the challenges of studying while caring for children or other dependents. RUB, for example, provides psychological counselling and social support to help students cope with stressful situations, balance academic and family life, and find appropriate child-care solutions.
- **Academic Advising for Student Parents:** Offering dedicated academic advising for students with caregiving responsibilities can help them explore flexible study options, including adjusting study plans or taking leaves of absence. Advisors can guide students on parental leave policies, how to manage maternity protection rights, and how to access special accommodations for family obligations, as done at RUB through the Central Student Advisory Service.

3. Flexible Study Arrangements

Flexible study options are crucial for students with caregiving responsibilities. Universities should offer tailored solutions to help these students manage both academic requirements and family commitments:

- **Maternity Protection and Leave of Absence:** Universities should provide clear information about maternity protection for student mothers, as well as options for taking a leave of absence to manage family responsibilities. Students should also be informed about how to return to their studies after a break, ensuring a smooth transition back into academic life.
- **Flexible Course Schedules:** Flexibility in course timetables and assessment deadlines can greatly benefit students with caregiving duties. Universities can



offer online courses, part-time study options, and the ability to extend deadlines for coursework. RUB supports students in organizing their studies around their caregiving commitments, including providing information on the implications of taking a leave of absence.

- **Accommodations and Support:** Students with caregiving duties may be eligible for special accommodations, such as extended time for exams, modified coursework schedules, or access to remote learning options. These measures can help ensure students are not disadvantaged by their family responsibilities.

4. Financial Support for Students with Care Responsibilities

Finances can be a significant concern for students with children or other dependents. Universities should provide comprehensive financial guidance to support these students:

- **Scholarships and Financial Aid:** Information on financial aid, including scholarships specifically for student parents or caregivers, should be easily accessible. Students should be guided on applying for financial aid and social services, such as government grants or child benefits. RUB provides advice on securing financial support for both students and their children during their studies.
- **Financial Support During Pregnancy:** Pregnant students may face additional financial burdens. Universities should inform students about available financial aid during pregnancy and how to access social services or benefits. RUB offers information on financial assistance for pregnant students, including grants from foundations aimed at supporting student parents.
- **Leave of Absence and Financial Implications:** Students should be made aware of the financial consequences of taking a leave of absence, including potential impacts on scholarships or government aid. Offering clear advice on managing financial responsibilities during a break from studies ensures students can make informed decisions. RUB provides thorough counselling on the financial implications of taking time off for family responsibilities.

5. Support for Returning to Studies

Students who have taken a leave of absence due to caregiving responsibilities often face challenges when returning to their academic programs. Universities should offer support to facilitate their reintegration into academic life:

- **Reintegration Programs:** Programs designed to help students transition back to their studies after a period of caregiving can be highly beneficial. These programs



could include refresher courses, mentoring from faculty members, and peer support groups.

- **Career and Academic Planning:** Dedicated advisors can help students with long-term career planning and ensure that their academic progress remains aligned with their goals, even if their studies were interrupted by caregiving responsibilities. Universities should offer personalized counselling to assist with re-enrolment, catch-up strategies, and long-term planning.





TOOL #3: Engagement for active fatherhood and support for men with care responsibilities

Despite progress in gender equality, caregiving responsibilities—whether for children, partners, or other family members—are still largely seen as women's work. This gendered perception creates challenges for men, particularly fathers, who seek to play an active role in caregiving. The societal expectation that women should take on the majority of caregiving perpetuates these roles, while making it harder for men to engage fully in parenting or other caregiving tasks. By fostering a supportive environment for male caregivers, institutions can promote gender equality and reduce the stigma men often encounter when they seek accommodations for caregiving.

This tool is designed to provide insights, resources, and actionable guidance for universities aiming to better support fathers and men with caregiving responsibilities. It addresses the structural and cultural barriers that men face in academia when trying to balance work and caregiving roles.

Guidance on Addressing Stereotypes, Biases, and Supporting Fathers and Mothers in Academia

Higher education institutions have a responsibility to address the stereotypes and biases that hinder both mothers and fathers from achieving a healthy balance between work and family. By recognizing that caregiving is not exclusive to mothers, fostering flexibility in work arrangements, and normalizing parental roles for men, HEIs can create a more inclusive environment. Through proactive policies and cultural shifts, academia can support parents in their dual roles, allowing them to thrive both personally and professionally.



Stereotypes and Biases Against Fathers and Mothers in Academia

In academic settings, both fathers and mothers face distinct biases and stereotypes that can hinder their ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities:

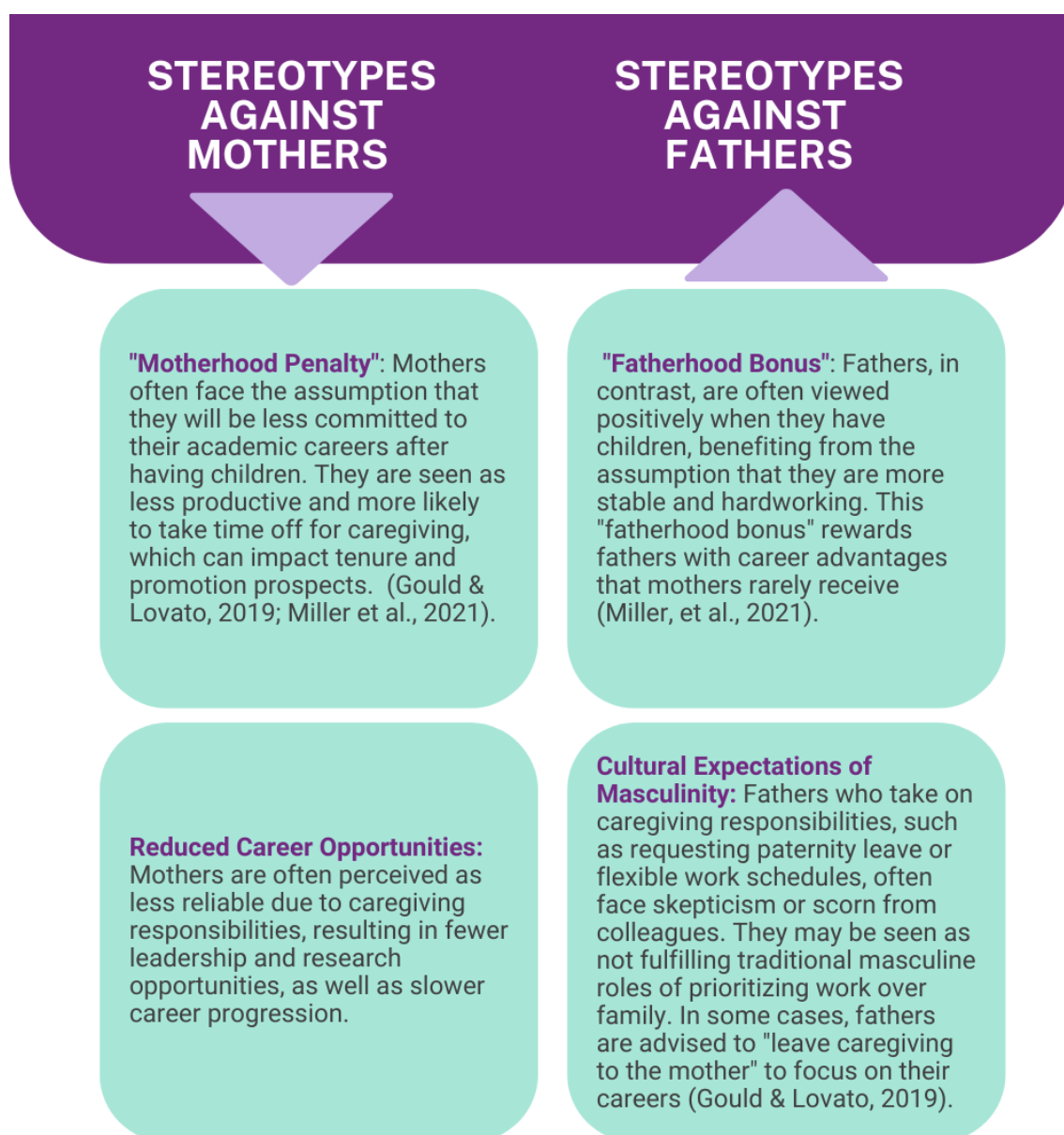


Figure 10: Stereotypes and biases against mothers and fathers in academia (Lovato, 2019; Miller et al., 2021)

- ➔ **Invisible Caregiving for Fathers:** Fathers who take on equal caregiving roles often struggle with institutional and social expectations that assume caregiving is primarily a mother's responsibility. Their requests for

accommodations are met with resistance, and they may face negative judgments regarding their masculinity (Gould & Lovato, 2019).

- **Overwork Expectations:** Academia tends to reward long hours and constant availability, making it difficult for both mothers and fathers to balance family responsibilities. The notion that true academic success requires full immersion into work perpetuates an unfriendly environment for parents (Gould & Lovato, 2019; Miller et al., 2021).

How Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) Can Act Against These Biases

1. Recognize That Both Mothers and Fathers Have Caregiving Responsibilities:

- HEIs should adopt policies that support both parents equally. This includes offering **paternity leave** that is on par with maternity leave, emphasizing that caregiving is not the sole responsibility of mothers. In many EU countries, models of **parental leave** have been implemented to encourage fathers to take an active role in caregiving, providing a model for academic institutions.

2. Implement Flexible Work Arrangements:

- Flexibility in scheduling is essential for parents, especially during early career stages when both mothers and fathers often feel pressure to prove their commitment. HEIs should allow for **adjustments to teaching schedules** and research duties, particularly for young fathers who might be navigating both family and career development.
- **Job sharing**, part-time options, and teleworking should be offered to make academia more inclusive for parents without forcing them to choose between career and family (see also **Tool #6 on Job- and Topsharing**).

3. Address Overwork Culture and Make Family-Friendly Practices Universal:

- **Family-unfriendly practices**, such as scheduling meetings or events outside of family-friendly hours (e.g., late evenings), impact both mothers and fathers. Institutions should ensure that important meetings and events are scheduled during standard working hours (9 a.m. to 5 p.m.), allowing parents to balance work and caregiving duties more effectively.
- Policies that prioritize **work-life balance**, such as limiting evening meetings, providing on-site childcare, and offering flexible leave options, should be normalized across the institution to benefit all parents.

4. Encourage Open Dialogue and Normalize Caregiving for Fathers:



- Many fathers avoid requesting the support they need for fear of being perceived as less committed to their careers or less masculine. HEIs should foster a *culture of open dialogue* where fathers feel comfortable expressing their needs for flexibility without fearing professional repercussions.
- Institutions can *normalize caregiving for men* by actively encouraging fathers to take paternity leave and by showcasing male role models who balance caregiving with academic success. This helps reduce the stigma surrounding male caregiving and aligns caregiving roles with modern views of masculinity.

5. Provide Support for Early Career Researchers:

- Young fathers, especially early career researchers, are often overlooked in discussions about work-life balance. HEIs should provide *mentorship and career support* specifically tailored to the needs of parents, including career planning and advice on balancing academic demands with family life (see also *Tool #1 on institutional support*).
- *Career development programs* for early career researchers should include components on navigating parenthood while progressing in academia, ensuring that fathers, as well as mothers, have access to resources that allow them to balance both responsibilities effectively (see also *Tool #1 on institutional support*).

6. Institutionalize Family and Medical Leave Policies:

- HEIs must implement *standardized family and medical leave policies* that apply to all parents, ensuring that both mothers and fathers can take time off without fear of jeopardizing their careers. These policies should be clearly communicated to all faculty and staff and integrated into tenure and promotion guidelines.





TOOL #4: Train Work-life balance based on RESET's training module

To cultivate a more inclusive academic culture, universities need to develop and implement tailored training programs that address central aspects of gender and diversity competence. These trainings can raise awareness, dispel biases, and provide the knowledge and practical strategies needed to drive change and address people in gatekeeping positions as well as other members of the university.

Based on RESET's training modules, developed by UL's team, we recommend to conduct trainings around Work-Life Balance Awareness and Strategies.

Context:

The RESET project team at the University of Lodz has developed a specialized training program, published as a "Comprehensive Gender Equality/Gender Mainstreaming Training Toolbox," designed to be adaptable for various trainee groups, national contexts, and different institutional and socio-cultural environments.

The Toolbox covers a wide range of gender and diversity skills, including strategies for preventing discrimination and unconscious bias, integrating the gender dimension into research methodologies, and nurturing positive relationships and attitudes that value diversity in professional environments.

The training program is founded on principles of intersectionality and co-design, ensuring flexibility for both broad project applications and specific contextual requirements. Its main goal is to actively engage university communities in fostering inclusive and diversity-driven academic cultures that prioritize equality. This culture aims to extend beyond the directly impacted groups, promoting a holistic and inclusive approach.



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Training Module:

This training module is designed to improve participants' understanding of work-life balance and its critical role in creating a positive and sustainable work environment. With a focus on exploring the dynamic relationship between work and non-work domains, the module will highlight how conflicts and facilitations arise between these areas and offer practical strategies to foster harmony. By increasing awareness of work-life balance phenomena, this workshop aims to empower participants to make informed decisions that enhance both professional productivity and personal well-being.

Target Audience

This module is designed for a wide range of participants within academic and administrative environments, including:

- *Top and middle management*
- *Researchers*
- *Teachers*
- *Administration staff*
- *PhD students and students*

Main Objective:

The overarching goal of the training is to equip participants with the knowledge and skills to build positive, healthy relationships between their work and personal lives, ensuring a sustainable balance that promotes well-being and professional success.

Specific Objectives:

- ➔ *Enhance knowledge of work-life balance:* Participants will learn about the fundamental concepts and importance of achieving balance between work and non-work responsibilities.
- ➔ *Understand the interplay between work and personal life:* The training will explore the bidirectional effects between work and non-work domains, identifying how one can influence the other both positively (facilitation) and negatively (conflict).
- ➔ *Identify causes and effects of imbalance:* Participants will gain insights into the main factors that contribute to work-life conflict and the resulting consequences for individuals and organizations.
- ➔ *Learn strategies to manage work-life balance:* The workshop will present practical techniques and long-term strategies to help participants achieve and maintain a sustainable work-life balance.



Methodology and Format

This training module will be conducted either *in-person or online*, based on the preference and availability of participants. It will be a synchronous, interactive workshop, enabling real-time engagement through discussions, case studies, and practical exercises. The facilitation will focus on active participation to ensure that each attendee can reflect on their own experience and develop tailored strategies for their specific roles and contexts.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the workshop, participants will:

- ☑ *Understand the bidirectional nature of work-life dynamics:* They will grasp how demands from non-work life can carry over into work, and vice versa, and how these interactions can be managed effectively.
- ☑ *Recognize the root causes of work-life conflict:* Participants will be able to identify key stressors and conflicts arising from competing demands in professional and personal spheres.
- ☑ *Be aware of the consequences of imbalance:* They will understand the personal, professional, and organizational costs of not maintaining work-life balance, including stress, burnout, and decreased productivity.
- ☑ *Acquire practical strategies for balance:* They will learn long-term techniques and approaches to integrate work and non-work domains in a harmonious, non-harmful way that supports well-being and success.

Conclusion

This training module aims to provide participants with actionable knowledge and strategies for achieving and maintaining a healthy work-life balance. By focusing on the interconnections between work and personal life, it promotes a sustainable approach to managing demands, improving both individual well-being and organizational performance. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of how to foster positive relationships between their professional and personal roles, leading to more fulfilling and balanced lives.





TOOL #5: How to make institutional measures on work/studies and personal life balance better known

This tool aims to improve the visibility and accessibility of institutional Work-Life Balance (WLB) measures in universities by enhancing communication strategies. Based on best practices, such as those implemented by the University of Bordeaux, this tool provides actionable steps for effectively communicating WLB initiatives to staff and students. By using a variety of communication formats, including digital media, interviews, webinars, and targeted internal communication channels, universities can ensure that their WLB policies are well-known and easily accessible to all.

The goal of this tool is to create a cohesive communication framework that makes institutional measures on WLB visible and accessible to all university members—academics, staff, and students—through clear, diverse, and engaging communication strategies. This tool will not only raise awareness but also foster a culture of openness and support around the challenges of balancing work/study with family and personal life.

By employing a mix of engaging digital content, accessible platforms, and regular communication, universities can make their WLB measures well-known and effective. Institutions can learn from examples like the University of Bordeaux, where a variety of communication tools are used to inform staff and students about work-life balance policies and practices. These efforts contribute to fostering an academic environment that values personal well-being alongside professional excellence.

Steps to Implement the Tool

Create a Dedicated Webpage on WLB

- ➔ Establish a **centralized webpage** on the university's intranet or public website that consolidates all information on WLB measures, family support, and available resources.



→ Include sections on:

- ☑ *Parental leave policies*
- ☑ *Caregiving support for elderly or dependent relatives*
- ☑ *Financial and social support, especially for students*
- ☑ *Childcare and health resources*
- ☑ *Flexible work/study options and reintegration programs*

→ Ensure the page is easy to navigate and regularly updated.

Use Video and Motion Design for Engagement

- Develop **videos and motion designs** that succinctly explain the key WLB measures and policies. These should be visually appealing, concise, and easy to share via institutional email newsletters, intranet, or social media channels.
- **Interviews with employees** (both academic and administrative) can highlight real-life experiences of balancing professional and personal life, offering relatable insights. For example, the University of Bordeaux produced videos where staff shared their challenges and solutions at different stages of parenthood. These videos helped demystify the process of balancing work and family life.
- Example videos from Bordeaux: [Parenting and Professional Life Video](#) and [Motion Design on Parenting Measures](#).

Host Webinars and Interactive Sessions

- Organize **regular webinars** on WLB-related topics, such as managing work while parenting, flexible working options, or financial support. These should be held at convenient times, such as during lunch breaks, to maximize attendance. Collaboration with local experts or associations can provide additional value.
- For example, UBx's **"Meetings of Social Action"** series features lunchtime webinars that provide practical advice on managing parenthood and professional responsibilities. These can be replayed for those unable to attend live, ensuring ongoing access to the information.
- Example of a webinar: [Webinar on Parenting and Money Management](#).

Develop Accessible Communication Channels

- Ensure that **targeted email newsletters** regularly update staff and students on available WLB measures. Include links to relevant resources, upcoming webinars, and new support services.



- Display **posters and motion graphics** around campus, particularly in high-traffic areas such as faculty lounges, cafeterias, and student centres, to increase visibility of WLB initiatives.
- Utilize **social media platforms** to share quick updates and links to relevant content. Brief announcements of new WLB measures or upcoming webinars can help reach a wider audience.

Foster a Culture of Openness and Support through Discussion

- Encourage **task forces or working groups** comprising diverse university staff to discuss challenges related to WLB and propose solutions. These groups should work closely with HR and social services to ensure that policies are aligned with employees' needs.
- Sharing experiences in forums or interviews not only raises awareness but also normalizes the conversation around caregiving, work-life balance, and gender roles in academia. This approach fosters a supportive environment where staff and students feel comfortable discussing their challenges.

Institutionalize Regular Feedback Mechanisms

- Regularly solicit **feedback from university members** on the effectiveness of WLB communication strategies. Conduct surveys or hold feedback sessions to understand how well the information is reaching staff and students and where improvements are needed.
- Update communication strategies based on this feedback to ensure they remain effective and relevant.





TOOL #6: Sharing is caring – Top-/ & Jobsharing as an instrument to foster family-friendly working environments

Jobsharing is an employment arrangement where two or more people share the responsibilities of a single full-time position, splitting the workload, hours, to a mutually agreed-upon schedule. Topsharing refers to the sharing of leadership functions in a leadership tandem (Watton & Stables, 2016). This makes it possible to perform management functions on a part-time basis, by sharing the leadership tasks among two leaders. Job- and Topsharing can help create a more inclusive academic environment by accommodating diverse career paths, including for women or other groups who may face additional work-life balance challenges.

This tool is dedicated to provide inspiration on how to make leadership positions more flexible to meet the needs in different career phases. It is based on the lessons learnt of RESET's report on diversity in gatekeeping and leadership positions (Niebel, 2024a).

Why Implement Job- and Topsharing in Academia?

- ☐ **Flexibility in Leadership Roles:** Leadership positions in academia often come with demanding workloads that may be incompatible with certain life phases (e.g., caregiving for children or elderly parents). Flexible models like Job- and Topsharing provide opportunities to tailor workload and responsibilities to individual needs without sacrificing career advancement. These models allow part-time leadership, ranging from near full-time positions to fully shared leadership roles (Karlshaus, 2016; Karlshaus & Kaehler, 2017a).
- ☐ **Work-Life Balance:** These models promote healthier work-life balance by allowing faculty to reduce hours, divide responsibilities, and maintain a full-time impact in a part-time or shared role. This is particularly important for those balanc-



ing caregiving duties, often disproportionately women. The cooperative and temporally flexible nature of these models can positively influence career development and facilitate the conciliation of family responsibilities and professional growth (Gärtner et al., 2016).

- **Diversity and Gender Equality:** Job- and Topsharing are powerful tools for increasing representation of women and other underrepresented groups in senior leadership positions. The models' flexible structures make it easier for individuals with caregiving or family responsibilities to take on leadership roles, fostering diversity in gatekeeping positions (Watton & Stables, 2016). This can be an effective strategy for retaining and increasing the number of women in senior academic roles by offering career advancement opportunities that align with personal life demands.

Models of Job- and Topsharing

1. Almost Full-Time Leadership (Part-Time):

- Individuals maintain a leadership role with reduced hours close to full-time.
- This model offers flexibility while allowing faculty to remain deeply engaged in leadership without compromising personal or family responsibilities.

2. Jobsharing or Job Splitting:

- Two individuals share a single leadership role by dividing tasks, responsibilities, and working hours.
- This method enhances peak-time availability and boosts overall institutional capacity, as the combined work often exceeds 100% of a full-time role (Karlshaus & Kaehler, 2017a). It also secures knowledge continuity in case one leader is absent due to illness or other personal reasons, ensuring smooth operation (Karlshaus, 2020).

3. Cadre Models:

- Similar to Jobsharing, but with an emphasis on mentoring newcomers in leadership roles by pairing them with more experienced colleagues.
- This model promotes leadership development, allowing newer faculty to gain hands-on experience in leadership tasks while reflecting on their roles in a supportive team environment (Karlshaus, 2020).



Practical Steps for Implementing Job- and Topsharing



Figure 11: Practical steps for implementing Job- & Topsharing



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Expectations and Monitoring

- ☑ **Tracking Progress:** Ongoing monitoring of Job- and Topsharing implementation is critical to assess its success. Institutions should measure not only the work-related effects of these flexible models but also their impact on career development, equal opportunities, and the family commitments of all participants, regardless of gender (Gärtner et al., 2016).
- ☑ **Preventing Pitfalls:** While these models offer many benefits, they come with potential challenges:
 - **Presence Culture:** In environments that emphasize physical presence over productivity, individuals in Job- or Topsharing roles may be at a disadvantage. To prevent this, institutions should focus on results and contributions rather than time spent on-site.
 - **Gender Stereotyping:** There is a risk that Job- and Topsharing may be informally "gendered," leading to the perception that these models are primarily for women. This could inadvertently lock women into part-time leadership roles even if they aspire to full-time positions. To avoid this, critical reflection, educational work, and gender-neutral promotion of the models are essential (Karlshaus, 2020; Troger, 2022).
 - **Leadership Hierarchization:** Care should be taken to prevent the creation of a hierarchy where full-time leadership roles are seen as more prestigious than shared models. Educational initiatives and adaptation of the models based on feedback are key to ensuring equal status for all leadership approaches (Karlshaus, 2020). Another limitation of this practice are regulations and contracts that may be too rigid to accommodate these changes and flexibilities, even if temporarily.



Conclusions and Outlook

Work-life balance in academia is a recurring theme that surfaced across many different exchanges and interactions of the project with university staff and students at RESET universities. This Toolbox builds on a wide range of RESET sources, not only encompassing surveys conducted by GEP-implementing partners where work-life balance emerged as a high priority for employees, but also workshops with women in leadership roles and contributions to the "Faces of Campus" media campaign, all of which explored the complex intersections of work, study, and personal life.

As highlighted, balancing caregiving with academic and professional demands is a major challenge, particularly for women, who still assume most caregiving responsibilities across Europe. Studies confirm that women dedicate significantly more time to child-care than men, which negatively impacts their career advancement, especially in academia. The expectation of full-time availability in academic roles further entrenches vertical segregation and disproportionately affects early-career researchers, particularly mothers. RESET underscores that supporting work-life balance requires more than individual adjustments; it necessitates systemic, institutional changes. Essential strategies include promoting flexible work options, career reintegration programs, and inclusive communication that addresses all caregivers, especially fathers, to challenge entrenched gender roles.

Though, it concluded that work-life balance extends beyond the challenges of parenthood. Care responsibilities, whether for children or relatives, impose unique psychological, social, temporal, and financial demands. As has been highlighted, rest and leisure are fundamental human rights, yet access to and quality of leisure time are shaped by workload, obligations, and intersecting social inequalities. Recognizing the broader scope of work-life dynamics is essential to addressing these varied and interconnected pressures on individuals, and to take institutional action to facilitate the reconciliation of leisure time, care, and work.

This toolbox aims to guide university policymakers in assessing where work-life balance measures are established and where they can be expanded. Following the "Lessons Learnt" in this toolbox, it emphasizes that effective work-life balance policies require strong institutional commitment and sensitive leadership. Leaders must actively support these policies by fostering inclusive recruitment practices, acknowledging caregiving challenges during interviews, and committing to career reintegration after leave. Human resource departments, supervisors, and department heads should be trained to model flexible work options, adjust workloads, and offer career support that addresses caregivers' specific needs.



For student caregivers juggling studies, caregiving, and employment, the pressures of "time poverty" and role conflict are particularly intense. They reinforce the need for institutions to provide flexible study arrangements, accessible childcare, funding opportunities, and a supportive environment where caregiving responsibilities are openly acknowledged and accommodated.

Additionally, the Toolbox highlights the persistent perception that caregiving is predominantly a female responsibility, reinforcing traditional gender roles. To counter this, HEIs should actively support active fatherhood by explicitly including fathers in caregiving policies and institutional communications. Inclusive language and visuals in WLB resources are essential to destigmatize fatherhood in caregiving roles, encouraging all parents to fully engage in caregiving responsibilities. By addressing these biases, universities foster a culture that values and supports both fathers and mothers, advancing gender equality and balanced caregiving.

Lastly, for WLB policies to be effective, institutions must ensure that information on parental leave, caregiving support, and flexible work options is readily accessible and clearly communicated to all staff and students. RESET's "FACES OF CAMPUS" media campaign and the "WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS" digital exhibition highlight the importance of inclusive, accessible communication in building a supportive institutional culture. Information about WLB should be prominently featured on university websites, intranets, and through advisory staff. This lesson has informed the development of tools that prioritize transparent and inclusive communication strategies, ensuring that caregiving support resources are visible and accessible to all members of the academic community.

By implementing actions inspired by the WLB Toolbox, HEIs demonstrate their commitment to work-life balance as an institutional responsibility rather than an individual burden. By recognizing and supporting diverse caregiving roles and promoting flexible, inclusive career paths, universities lay the groundwork for a future where gender equality and diversity are integral to academic culture.



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Annex 1: Overview on work-life balance and family friendliness measures and targets in RESET's GEP 1.0s:

Task 6.4	
AUTH	<p>Propose flexible and remote work adjustments to the Senate for both academic and administrative staff members with caregiving responsibilities; implementation by competent authorities and services as per the applicable legislation.</p> <p>Carry out research to record the needs for childcare services for university employees and students.</p> <p>Stipulate the provision of facilities and actions pertaining to the creative engagement of children during major events/conferences/workshops/holiday seasons for university community members, at a low cost</p> <p>Provide a space to be used as a lactation room (for breast-feeding and/or breast milk pumping) at the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation (CIRI, Greek: KEDEK) and every faculty.</p>
UBx	<p>Encouraging managers to organize individual interviews before and/or after long periods of leave, in order to discuss career development options and current projects, and point people towards the right people and resources (e.g. available training options)</p> <p>In coordination with the RESET project, and adopting a participatory approach, we will invite staff and students to take part in working groups exploring more equal approaches to parenthood</p> <p>Rolling out communication actions highlighting the available rights and tools for managing the work-life balance. The RESET Media Campaign for 2023 will focus on balancing professional life with parenthood.</p> <p>Training managers so that they can better advise their teams about work-life balance measures</p> <p>Organizing collective (optional) information sessions for staff focusing on the various existing work-life balance measures</p>
UL	<p>The development and implementation of a tool for monitoring academic performance as correlated with one's family/personal situation;</p> <p>The design and implementation of a system of reaction to individual family/personal situations (such as flexible work, temporary modification of professional responsibilities).</p> <p>The development and implementation of a tool for monitoring career breaks;</p>
U.Porto	<p>Promote a better balance between professional and family life through more flexible working time and locations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take the implications of flexible working time and location measures into consideration



- Disseminate mechanisms that promote an equal access to flexible hours among the Organic Units

Foster an organizational culture that minimizes the impact of family care on the career:

- Disseminate information on work/work-family reconciliation rights adequate to the various internal concerned parties
- Appoint a person/service to advise/support workers in the reconciliation of professional life with parental and family care responsibilities
- Define forms of reintegration/returning to work after prolonged periods of absence (e.g., leaves, illness)
- Organize awareness-raising campaigns regarding the effects of gender stereotypes on the distribution of household and family responsibilities (e. g., disseminating images of both genders as caregivers)
- Foster the establishment and dissemination of protocols with different care provision structures (e.g., childhood, old age, dependency)



Annex 2: RESET Survey 2.0, sociodemographic information on survey participants by GEP-implementing institution

Information on RESET Survey 2.0	
AUTH	<p>A total of 96 questionnaires were collected, with 91 being complete and available for analysis. The majority of respondents (68.1%) identified as female, significantly outnumbering males (28.6%), while 3.3% chose not to disclose their gender or identified differently. The participants ranged in age from 26 to 77, with the most common age group being 46 to 54 years old.</p> <p>In terms of professional status, the survey revealed a diverse distribution, with 45.1% of respondents being professors, followed by 29.7% administrative staff, 14.3% teaching assistants, and 11% postdoctoral researchers. The respondents also came from various scientific fields, reflecting the interdisciplinarity of the university. Most participants (51.8%) were from STEM fields (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), followed by non-STEM fields (26.2%) and services (22%).</p>
Bordeaux	<p>Out of 491 responses, 473 were in French and 18 in English, with 457 complete and available for analysis, representing approximately 7% of the university's personnel. The majority of respondents are women (64%), slightly over-represented compared to their 55% share of the total personnel at UBx.</p> <p>Administrative staff make up 51% of respondents, closely reflecting their 47% share of the university's workforce. However, there is an under-representation of teacher-researchers, teachers, and researchers, who constitute 36% of respondents, despite making up 53% of the university's personnel. Many respondents in the "other" category are students working part-time for the university.</p>
UL	<p>Out of 203 responses, 199 were complete and available for analysis, while four declined participation and data processing. The majority of respondents are women (67%), slightly over-represented compared to their 62% share of total personnel at UL, yet the survey still reflects a fairly accurate gender representation within the institution.</p> <p>The majority of respondents (67%) are teacher-researchers, with only 3% being researchers and 5.5% teaching staff, which aligns with the smaller size of these groups in the academic community. Administrative staff (9%) and doctoral students (3%) are underrepresented, which should be considered when interpreting the results.</p> <p>Regarding employment, 83% of respondents are on permanent contracts, while 17% are on temporary or other forms of employment. The average age of participants is 44.71 years, although 8.5% chose not to disclose their age. Socio-demographic analysis showed that 2% of respondents have a disability (slightly underrepresented), and 97% are Polish, with only 1% identifying as foreign nationals.</p>



U.Porto

The final sample consisted of 493 participants, with ages ranging from 22 to 77 years ($M = 46$; $SD = 11.4$), and 96% identifying as Portuguese nationals. Regarding gender identity, 344 participants identified as women, 133 as men, two as non-binary, two as genderqueer, and 13 preferred not to answer. Professionally, 50.3% of participants were staff, 32.7% were professors, and 13.5% were researchers.

The Survey 2.0 Report highlights that many participants see a need to further address work-life balance in the GEP 2.0. Participants were able to select up to five priority areas, with the most frequently mentioned topics being work-life balance (167 mentions), combatting stereotype-based discrimination (124 mentions), recruitment and career progression (96 mentions), and general university policy (92 mentions).



Annex 3: WORK=LIFE OF CAMPUS Contributions concerning parenthood

Uni	Example	Link
UBx P1	<p>Lecturer in the field of Electronics at the University of Bordeaux (female)</p> <p>What do you find particularly challenging about your weekly schedule?</p> <p>The combination of various professional activities in the same day is extremely energy consuming. My weekly rest time is a bit limited. Every academic year is a marathon and I count on the weeks of academic holidays to recharge my batteries and enjoy my family life.</p> <p>How do you draw motivation and strength from your week?</p> <p>I like to invest in pedagogical projects to improve study conditions and students' success, who show immediate recognition.</p> <p>Investment in research projects is essential since the career of teachers-researchers is mainly evaluated on their research activities. It is a demanding and extremely stimulating environment. The recognition through publications, whether in international journals or at international conferences, that enable me to travel is very rewarding.</p> <p>To sum up, I love my job of a teacher-researcher. It is a great source of pleasure and recognition every day, despite a heavy but necessary workload.</p> <p>What important events or people could not find a place in your timeline?</p> <p>In my work, my own research and publication activities, apart from research projects and doctoral supervision, come last due to time overload.</p> <p>As a mother, I sometimes feel guilty about spending little time with my children, now aged between 3 and 6 compared to other mothers who choose to work part-time. However, my job gives me the opportunity to have academic holidays, which allow me to enjoy half of the school holidays and spend quality time with my children.</p>	https://were-set.eu/work-life-of-campus/weekly-schedule-of-a-lecturer-in-the-field-of-electronics-university-of-bordeaux/
	<p><i>P1 presents the combination of different work tasks and roles in one day as a major challenge, as this is associated with a high energy expenditure. There is little time to regenerate, especially in the academic year, which she</i></p>	



	<p><i>compares to a marathon. This makes vacation periods the times when she can recharge her batteries and enjoy time with her family. She draws motivation and strength for her work from her work, in which she receives recognition. This recognition is based, on the one hand, on feedback from students, for whom she is involved in projects to improve study conditions and academic success. On the other hand, at the scientific level, it is based on recognition through publications and lectures, which also make it possible to travel. Nevertheless, her own research and the associated publication activities are neglected in her work. And as a mother who works full-time, she sometimes feels guilty because she doesn't spend as much time with her children as mothers who work part-time. Nevertheless, she emphasizes the fact that academic holidays allow her to spend half of the school holidays with her children.</i></p>	
UBx P2	<p>Lecturer in the field of Engineering (male)</p> <p>To what extent is this your typical weekly schedule? Are there more frequent variations?</p> <p>This schedule is fairly representative. Obviously, from week to week my schedule may vary and some weeks are totally different because I am at a conference or away, for example But overall, it represents my professional and personal activities quite well.</p> <p>What do you find particularly challenging about your weekly schedule?</p> <p>What I find most difficult is the large variety of tasks in my job, which is exhausting, but it is also the reason why I love this job. If I add to this variety of activities household chores, 2 children and travel time, it makes the week very tiresome and it is a challenge from an organizational point of view.</p> <p>How do you draw motivation and strength from your week?</p> <p>I love what I do, I love my job.</p> <p>Do you put some tasks, activities, people aside because of overload in this schedule?</p> <p>Yes, of course. There are only 24 hours in a day. However, I have decided to stop neglecting my sleeping time, otherwise my health will decline. I think I put my family (apart from my children and my wife) and my friends a bit aside.</p> <p>How do you organise yourself to have time to dedicate to other people (partner, family members, colleagues or friends)?</p>	<p>https://were-set.eu/work-life-of-campus/weekly-schedule-of-a-lecturer-in-the-field-of-engineering-university-of-bordeaux</p>



	<p>My schedule management is flexible, which makes it much easier for me to organise the time I spend with my close family. As far as my extended relatives and friends are concerned, I must admit that I rely a lot on my wife.</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to change about your weekly schedule?</p> <p>I would like to be able to reduce the number of tasks I have to do so that I can slow down my pace of life.</p>	
	<p><i>- As it is the case in other statements, P2 presents the reconciliation of very different work tasks as a major challenge. At the same time, the versatility of the work is a great motivation to do it. In addition to the challenges of doing justice to all the tasks, there are also family relationships and household chores and travel, so that managing the week is tiring and organizing it is challenging. At the same time, work motivation is drawn from the work itself. The density of work and family commitments requires prioritizing how time is spent. The person emphasizes getting enough sleep as an important factor that promotes good health. However, time with friends and extended family is shorter. The person would like to be able to reduce the number of tasks in order to have a slower pace of life.</i></p>	
UL P3	<p>Assistant Professor, Cultural Studies, taking care of 2 children (ages 6 and 13)</p> <p>To what extent is this your typical weekly schedule? Are there more frequent variations?</p> <p>This is my typical weekly schedule for April 2023. It does not include weekends. I try not to work on weekends and have some detox from computer, social media, e-mails and screens but, unfortunately, I still found it difficult not to do any work-related activities. I typically work for 2-3 hours on Sunday evening, preparing myself for all the activities in the coming week. Also, in the summertime I usually plan some research activities. This year in July I am going to spend 4 weeks in the US doing research for my book and within one of my projects. I try to take my family when I travel for research abroad.</p> <p>What do you find particularly challenging about your weekly schedule?</p> <p>I struggle not to work in the evenings but sometimes this is unavoidable (then I typically do administrative work, e-mails, communication on Teams with co-workers and students, and advertising work-related events on social</p>	<p>https://were-set.eu/work-life-of-campus/weekly-schedule-of-an-assistant-professor-university-of-lodz/</p>



	<p>media). I also read research-related publications and reports. As mentioned above, the main challenge is working on weekends. I try to have at least Friday afternoon and evening as well as Saturday free of any professional engagement.</p> <p>What important events or people could not find a place in the timeline?</p> <p>When I was younger, I found it difficult to have enough time for family and friends. After the COVID-19 pandemics I changed my attitude and try to have enough time for my children and partner in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening. I do struggle, though, to maintain close relationship with friends.</p> <p>How do you arrange time periods and tasks with other people (e.g. partners, family members, colleagues or friends)?</p> <p>I try to plan meetings, trips, consultations, etc. way ahead. Since I coordinate a few EU-funded projects, I cooperate with a diverse group of researchers who are equally busy as I am. That is why it is important to arrange tasks and activities in advance. As for family, we plan our weekly schedule with my Partner typically on Sunday, dividing home activities (cleaning, shopping, cooking) equally.</p>	
	<p><i>- Even though P3 tries not to work on weekends, she usually spends 2-3 hours on Sunday evenings preparing for the coming week. She finds it difficult not to do work-related tasks at the weekend. In the summer, she often has research activities and tries to take her family with her when she travels during daylight saving time. She does not always manage to avoid working in the evenings, and it often seems unavoidable. In particular, it is then administrative tasks, answering e-mails or other communication with staff and students, as well as sharing work-related events, e.g. on social media. Research-related publications and research reports are also read after work. She tries at least not to work Friday afternoon and evening, and Saturday. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, she has been careful to have periods of time throughout the day when she can spend with her family, but it is mainly friendships that she cannot maintain due to the density of the days. She tries to plan meetings and trips well in advance. As a family, they usually plan the weekly schedule on Sundays and divide the household tasks equally among themselves.</i></p>	



<p>UL P4</p>	<p>Lecturer, Literary Studies</p> <p>Taking care of: 2 children (ages 22 and 17), 1 Dog</p> <p>To what extent is this your typical weekly schedule? Are there more frequent variations?</p> <p>This schedule is rather schematic, taking into account the variety of activities during the week. It happens that some of them are intensified, e.g. before going to a conference or sending an article for publication. Then the scientific work actually dominates my entire working week. The schedule of the day/week is also changed by the absence or illness of family members, which forces everyone to reorganize their duties. When you live outside the city, such a schedule is closely intertwined with the seasons. In the summer, commuting to work and school takes much less time that can be devoted to research or rest.</p> <p>How do you draw motivation and strength from your week?</p> <p>I am most motivated by my own satisfaction with teaching and generally good interpersonal relations at work. When I see the effects of my scientific work and I manage to reconcile it with the organization of household duties, then I fully believe in my possibilities as a woman and scientist. However, I know that such an ideal situation is rare, so I try to appreciate every little positive aspect of my work and forget about failures.</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to change about your weekly schedule?</p> <p>Yes, when I work from home, I would like to be able to separate this time more clearly from caring responsibilities (children and elderly). However, this is not always possible. What's more, as a mother, I know that a home office is one of the benefits of research work. However, experience has shown me that this asset can work against us, especially when it comes to women.</p>	<p>https://were-set.eu/work-life-of-campus/weekly-schedule-of-a-lecturer-university-of-lodz/</p>
	<p>- P4 emphasizes how the structure of the work, the routines and time periods for the various aspects of the work also change depending on whether there are cases of illness in the family or deadlines for articles are approaching. Seasons can also play a role in the case of commuting, since longer journeys have to be taken into account in the cold/wet months. This contributor draws her main motivation from her own satisfaction with the teaching and good interpersonal relationships at work. This brings the social aspect of working together to the fore. Successfully combining scientific work with tasks</p>	



	<p><i>in the family and household are factors that make her happy, but these are rather rare and tend to be an ideal. Therefore, she tries to appreciate even small positive aspects and not dwell on failures. Working from home not only has advantages, but also the challenge of separating working hours more clearly from caregiving responsibilities. For her as a mother, the possibility of working from home is one of the advantages of working in research. At the same time, her experience has shown her that this advantage can turn into a disadvantage, especially for women, reflecting the demands of caregiving.</i></p>	
U.Porto P5	<p>Researcher/Psychologist Taking care of: 1 daughter age 13), 2 sons (ages 8 and 17), mother (at distance)</p> <p>To what extent is this your typical weekly schedule? Are there more frequent variations?</p> <p>This is a typical week with my work schedule and the schedule of the children's activities that I take care of. This leaves out the activities that my partner takes care of, and the older children that no longer need help with their travel. I don't always have consultations on Mondays and Thursdays in the evenings.</p> <p>What do you find particularly challenging about your weekly schedule?</p> <p>The biggest challenge of my routine is to conciliate all the activities and find moments of rest.</p> <p>How do you draw motivation and strength from your week?</p> <p>The biggest motivation I find is feeling that I am actually doing what I like, and I get a sense of self-efficacy out of these activities.</p> <p>What important events or people could not find a place in the timeline?</p> <p>I usually visit my mother on Sunday. This leaves out friends and extended family who are difficult to include in the schedule. As such, I find it very difficult to allocate time for other people.</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to change about your weekly schedule?</p> <p>I would like to have at least two free nights a week.</p>	<p>https://were-set.eu/work-life-of-campus/weekly-schedule-of-a-researcher-university-of-porto/</p>
	<p><i>- P5 emphasizes the division of care tasks between her and her partner. She identifies the challenge of coordinating all activities and also finding moments of rest. She finds motivation in the fact that she enjoys her work and experiences a sense of self-efficacy. Time for people</i></p>	



	<i>outside of her family is rare, as is time for herself. This person would like to have at least two free evenings a week.</i>	
U.Porto P6	<p>What do you find particularly challenging in your weekly schedule?</p> <p>Trying to reconcile personal and family life with professional life. Considering the demands in the working world and having quality time with the family is without a doubt a challenge. That old maxim of when you are, you are whole is really my biggest challenge on a daily basis.</p> <p>How do you find motivation and strength in your week?</p> <p>I am a self-motivated person, which helps a lot in my way of being and looking at things and the difficulties that happen on a daily basis.</p>	https://were-set.eu/work-life-of-campus/weekly-schedule-of-a-staff-member-in-human-resources-university-of-porto/
	<i>- P6 emphasizes the difficulty of balancing leisure and working time. Meeting the demands of both spheres is seen as particularly challenging. It seems difficult not to be in the other area with your head, i.e. not to think about work outside of working hours, or not to think about family obligations during working hours. On the one hand, this person gains motivation and strength from the fact that they motivate themselves, which they see as a great advantage in meeting the challenges of everyday life.</i>	
RUB P7	<p>PhD candidate & Research Associate, Philology</p> <p>What important events or people could not find a place in the timeline?</p> <p>I can only fit in visits to friends or family (e.g., grandparents) on weekends. Important messages and phone calls are mostly squeezed in. I can't find any time for political activities anymore. I eat unhealthy food because I too seldom find the time to cook.</p> <p>How do you arrange time periods and tasks with other people (e.g., partners, family members, colleagues, or friends)?</p> <p>I must plan ahead a lot, communicating with my wife (who has a full-time job, compared to my 60%), my wife's parents (who spend time with our daughter when she's not in kindergarten and we're working), and our babysitter (who takes over when no family member is available). Luckily, arranging time with colleagues and friends is no big deal, since they either have a similar schedule or are ready to adapt. My supervisor respects my schedule and will not contact me outside my working hours.</p>	https://were-set.eu/work-life-of-campus/weekly-schedule-of-a-phd-candidate-field-of-philology-ruhr-university-bochum/



	<p>- P7 emphasizes that he finds no time for friends and family during the week. There is no time left for political engagement, nor for cooking, which affects the quality of the food. Coordinating time takes a lot of communication, namely with the partner, grandparents and babysitters. At the same time, this participant has a considerate personal and professional environment that takes into account his working and care hours.</p>	
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