


# EU Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers in the Context of Human Resources Problems in the Polish Public Administration

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**Abstract:** This article attempts to present and assess the adequacy of the solutions in the directive on work-life balance for parents and carers in the context of the problems and challenges faced by the Polish public administration in human resource management. The directive's solutions are analyzed from the perspective of post-pandemic reality, demography, changes in the structure of society and equality, and growing numbers and activation of women in the labor market. An example of applying the WLB policy in the Polish civil service was also presented.

## 1. Introduction

The changes brought by the post-pandemic reality, changing structure of society, socio-economic changes, digitization, and the changing labor market, including managing human resources, are undoubtedly a great challenge for public administration. The ongoing transformations significantly affect human functioning and increase the quality of life. Still, they also generate a number of new threats and challenges, such as maintaining a balance between work and private life. The increasing pace of life and the ever-increasing demands regarding both professional and personal life make conflict between these two spheres inevitable. The changing demographics, family model, conditions of its functioning, and the burden of an increasing number of duties make the search for a balance between

professional and personal life necessary for the proper functioning of a human being. Therefore, the challenge has become to develop and implement mechanisms to reconcile professional and private life, the so-called work-life balance (WLB). Challenges related to globalization, rapid development of technology, increasing competitiveness, and constantly emerging crises mean that employers and employees face increased demands and mutual expectations. Empirical research suggests that job satisfaction is one of the most important factors and predictors of overall life satisfaction. An employer aware of the changes taking place and wants to meet them must be open to the employees' needs in this area. In order to be competitive in the labor market and attract and retain the best employees, creating and improving the work-life balance policy is now necessary and has become a permanent part of human resource management.

The importance of issues related to maintaining a balance between these two spheres is emphasized by the European Union. Considering, among other things, the promotion of employment and the improvement of living and working conditions, the EU policy is to support and complement the activities of the member states regarding equal opportunities for both sexes on the labor market and equal treatment at work.<sup>1</sup> At present, the challenge facing the European Union is to deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. It continues to have a considerable impact on people's lives worldwide, with serious repercussions on the quality of life and work.<sup>2</sup> The EU has a long-standing commitment to promote work-life balance. This has resulted in targets set to improve childcare, addressing the work-life balance challenges parents and carers face. In order to monitor and further investigate progress in this area, the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) module on reconciliation between work and family life was implemented in 2018.<sup>3</sup> On 17 November 2017,

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<sup>1</sup> Article 153(1)(i) of the Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (O.J.E.C. C326, 26 October 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The effects of the pandemic on the lives and work of Europeans are the subject of research conducted by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound).

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat, "Reconciliation of work and family life – statistics," accessed February 10, 2023, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Reconciliation\\_of\\_work\\_and\\_family\\_life\\_-\\_statistics&oldid=511883#Background](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Reconciliation_of_work_and_family_life_-_statistics&oldid=511883#Background).

the European Parliament, the Council, and the European Commission formally proclaimed the European Pillar of Social Rights, which included an initiative to promote work-life balance. The answer to the future challenges faced by the labor market in the EU was the introduction of the directive on work-life balance for parents and carers on June 17, 2019. Work-life balance policies should contribute to the achievement of gender equality by promoting the participation of women in the labor market, the equal sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women, and the closing of the gender gaps in earnings and pay. Such policies should consider demographic changes, including the effects of an ageing population.<sup>4</sup>

The directive lays down minimum requirements designed to achieve equality between men and women regarding labor market opportunities and treatment at work by facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life for working parents and carers. To that end, it provides for individual rights related to paternity leave, parental leave and carers' leave, as well as flexible working arrangements for working parents and carers.

In the face of ongoing changes and new challenges related to, among others, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, an analysis of solutions facilitating the reconciliation of professional and personal life, including family life, which will enable combining work with other duties, seems necessary from the point of view of effective human resource management in public administration in Poland. Human resource management directly affects the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration. Work-life balance policies and initiatives are key to developing a diverse workforce in the public sector and increasing the employment rate of women, which is all the more relevant in the context of public administration, as women account for more than 68% of public administration employees.

This article aims to discuss the assumptions of the directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers, which is the basis for the changes introduced to Polish labor laws. The above discussion will be made in the context of diagnosed

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<sup>4</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU (O.J.E.C. L188).

contemporary and future problems and challenges in human resource management in public administration in Poland. The relevant considerations will be preceded by general comments on the concept of work-life balance, with particular emphasis on the assumptions of European Union policy. Then, the most important changes in labor laws related to the implementation of the WLB directive will be presented, as well as the main problems and challenges in human resource management in public administration in Poland in the context of WLB solutions; moreover human resource management in the civil service as an example of the implementation of the WLB policy in public administration.

The research questions that the author tried to answer were: Are the solutions of the WLB directive adequate to the diagnosed problems that public administration is currently facing and will also face in the near future? Should actions be taken, including those of a legal nature, going beyond the minimum specified in EU regulations? Should the public administration take forward-looking and strategic actions regarding WLB solutions?

## **2. The Essence and Assumptions of Work-Life Balance**

The assumptions of the work-life balance concept were created as a result of the emergence of real needs to introduce solutions to maintain the employees' balance between work and personal life. Attention was drawn to the fact that the employees' personal life has a direct impact on their effectiveness, efficiency, motivation, and creativity. The correlation between professional work and personal life turned out to be a matter of interest not only to the employees but also to the employers. The use of specific solutions by employers to help the employees combine these two spheres of life pays off in obtaining measurable economic benefits and determines their competitiveness in the labor market. Work-life balance is a term that is difficult to define. This is due to the ambiguity of the terms it includes, but mostly "life", which in this case covers the entire area of human activity outside work. It means such spheres as family life (care for children and other dependants), social life (e.g. maintaining relationships with other people), and personal life (e.g. health care, hobbies, recreation). When defining work-life balance, the subjective approach of a person to this problem and

cultural conditions should be taken into account.<sup>5</sup> At the individual level, work-life balance means the ability to combine work with other dimensions of human life, home, family, health, social activity, and private interests. At the state level, the reconciliation of work and family life is part of three policies: employment policy, family policy, and gender equality policy.

Work-life balance is defined as the overall level of contentment resulting from an assessment of one's degree of success at meeting work and family role demands.<sup>6</sup> Some definitions suggest that work-life balance is the ability to accomplish the goals set in both work and personal life and achieve satisfaction in all life domains. Other definitions suggest that the term balance implies equal engagement in and satisfaction with work and personal life roles. Still, other definitions include the idea that balance is indicative of the absence of conflict between work and personal life, an idiosyncratic construct, or a social construct built between an individual and others in their work and personal life domains.<sup>7</sup> It is also referred to as equal engagement in and satisfaction with work and personal life roles,<sup>8</sup> where individuals and other people in their lives perceive little or no conflict between work and personal life.<sup>9</sup> WLB is defined as such organizational activities (e.g. flexible working time, telework, childcare at the workplace) that facilitate the reconciliation of professional and non-professional duties, i.e. caring for dependants and having a personal life, hobbies, leisure, or recreation.<sup>10</sup>

The first sphere of interest of employers in the personal life of employees was family life. The precursors of using family-friendly solutions are American companies, which from the 1960s noticed the growing problem

<sup>5</sup> Katarzyna Hildt-Ciupińska, "Work-life balance a wiek pracowników," *Bezpieczeństwo Pracy – Nauka i Praktyka*, no. 10 (2014): 14.

<sup>6</sup> Anja-Kristin Abendroth and Lura den Dulk, "Support for the Work-Life Balance in Europe: The Impact of State, Workplace, and Family Support on Work-Life Balance Satisfaction," *Work, Employment and Society* 25, no. 2 (2011): 3.

<sup>7</sup> Carrie Bulger, "Work-Life Balance," in *Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research*, ed. Alex C. Michalos (Heidelberg–New York–London: Springer Dordrecht, 2014), 7231–2.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Greenhaus, Karen M. Collins, and Jason D. Shaw, "The Relation between Work – Family Balance and Quality of Life," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 63, no. 3 (2003): 510–31.

<sup>9</sup> Sue Campbell Clark, "Work-Family Border Theory: A New Theory of Work-Life Balance," *Human Relations: Thousand Oaks* 53, no. 6 (2000): 747–70.

<sup>10</sup> Hildt-Ciupińska, "Work-life," 14.

of reconciling professional and family roles, especially by women raising small children, who began to enter the labor market en masse. In the following years, a conviction emerged very quickly, supported by numerous studies conducted mainly in the 1990s, especially in the USA, Canada, and Australia, that all employees in companies should be covered by work-life balance programmes. As noted by David Clutterbuck, the inability to meet the needs of employees who want fulfilment in life is the cause of problems in most companies, including those related to achieving a competitive advantage and maintaining profitability.<sup>11</sup> Research shows that work-life balance plays a vital role in individual well-being, such as health satisfaction, family satisfaction, and overall life satisfaction. Hence, this is a key area of research in organizational behavior, human resource management, and quality of life studies.<sup>12</sup>

The essence of work-life balance is defined as directing attention to maintaining a balance between professional and personal life, enabling the individual to strive for self-realization in non-work aspects of life while maintaining an understanding of the multidimensionality of the situation. Therefore, WLB is the attitude of the employer and the employee manifested in activities facilitating the balance between professional work and private life. The key to realizing this idea is to perceive these two spheres as complementary, not opposed to each other. The goal, however, is satisfaction and well-being in all spheres of life without making difficult decisions that may negatively impact our actions.<sup>13</sup> The standards of human resource management in the civil service specify that the main objective of WLB is to promote solutions aimed at reconciling work with other aspects of the employee's life, creating a friendly atmosphere at work, increasing the motivation and efficiency of employees, strengthening the positive

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<sup>11</sup> Cecylia Sadowska-Snarska, "Wspieranie równowagi praca-życie pracowników na poziomie firm: teoria i praktyka," *Research Papers of Wrocław University of Economics*, no. 292 (2013): 100–2.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph M. Sirgy and Dong-Jin Lee, "Work-Life Balance: An Integrative Review," *Applied Research in Quality of Life* 13 (2018): 229.

<sup>13</sup> Małgorzata Gotowska, "Work Life Balance in the Balance Model of Life (Being)," in *Relacja praca-życie pozazawodowe. Droga do zrównoważonego rozwoju jednostki*, ed. Renata Tomaszewska-Lipiec (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, 2014), 64.

image of the employer among employees and job candidates, and supporting a healthy lifestyle.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Work-Life Balance Assumptions in the Policy of the European Union

Work-life balance refers to the level of prioritization between an individual's work and personal life. A good work-life balance is achieved when an individual's right to a fulfilled life inside and outside paid work is accepted and respected as the norm for the mutual benefit of the individual, business, and society. Enabling a better work-life balance for workers across the life course has been an EU policy goal for many years, as it is central to ensuring that work is sustainable for all.<sup>15</sup>

The first changes in the EU countries could be noticed in the early 1990s when attention began to be paid to the need to involve employers in helping employees combine professional and family life. In 1997, the European Employment Strategy (EES) established a framework to encourage EU member states to implement effective policies. As a result of demographic change, the proportion of people of working age in the EU is shrinking while the relative number of those retired is expanding. The share of older people in the total population is expected to increase significantly in the coming decades. This may, in turn, lead to an increased burden on those of working age to provide for the social expenditure required by the ageing population for a range of related services.<sup>16</sup>

More and more companies are aware that to attract and retain talented employees, they must focus their activities not only on offering adequate remuneration but also on creating an appropriate organizational and work culture conducive to reconciling life.<sup>17</sup> At the organizational level, the dis-

<sup>14</sup> Ordinance No. 6<sup>1</sup> of the Head of Civil Service of 12th March 2020 concerning the standards of human resources management in the civil service.

<sup>15</sup> Eurofund, "Work-life balance," accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/work-life-balance>.

<sup>16</sup> Eurostat, "Population Structure and Ageing," accessed February 10, 2023, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population\\_structure\\_and\\_ageing](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_structure_and_ageing).

<sup>17</sup> Ewliira Gross-Gołačka, "Jak wygląda zarządzanie różnorodnością i work-life balance w Polsce," in *Odwaga i równowaga czyli work-life balance po polsku* (Warsaw: Karta różnorodności koordynowana przez Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2020), 55.

cussed concept and its solutions are an instrument for improving the quality of work and life. In the external dimension, a positive image of the employer is being built (employer branding). For organizations implementing the WLB concept, it is easier and cheaper to attract suitable candidates for work in the company, and, at the same time, it is easier to prevent the outflow of employees to the competition.<sup>18</sup> In Poland, this plays a fundamental role in creating a strong, stable public administration staff, where recruiting and retaining high-class specialists, e.g. IT, has been very difficult for years. Research shows that an effective work-life balance policy translates into decreased absenteeism and staff liquidity, protection of investments made in employees, lower recruitment and training costs, less frequent use of sick leave, reduced employee stress, greater employee loyalty, increased productivity, and improved company image. Effective implementation of work-life reconciliation measures can benefit both employees and employers. On the one hand, it is a way to better manage and use employees' potential; on the other hand, WLB measures also provide an opportunity to earn the reputation of a good employer and attract the best and most competent employees to the company. The above benefits play an important role for the Polish public administration, which should develop specific, high standards in this respect to become an attractive employer in the labor market.

The premise of the new work-life balance directive for parents and carers is that the work-life balance policies should contribute to the achievement of gender equality by promoting the participation of women in the labor market, making it easier for men to share caring responsibilities on an equal basis with women, and closing gender gaps in earnings and pay.<sup>19</sup> The directive sets out a number of new or improved minimum standards for parental, paternity and carers' leave, as well as flexible working arrangements, also aimed at increasing their uptake by men. The previous EU directive from 2010 was repealed due to demographic challenges, migration problems, and the situation of women in the EU labor market. Work-life balance is the subject of research by specialized EU bodies. Since this is

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<sup>18</sup> Gotowska, "Work life balance," 65.

<sup>19</sup> Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU (O.J.E.C. L188).



an important issue for the EU and refers to problems related to the labor market, shaping demographics and gender equality, the results of the observations and analyses are the basis for the introduced legal solutions. Eurofound gathers information on working life in the EU, looking at national and EU-level policies to promote work-life balance and investigating the role of social dialogue and collective bargaining in this area. The European Quality of Life Surveys (EQLS) provide comparisons between countries on the reconciliation of work and family life, flexible working time arrangements, and the provision of quality care services. The EQLS indicators are more inclusive of environmental and social aspects of progress and, therefore, easily integrated into the decision-making process and taken up by public debate at EU and national levels in the European Union.<sup>20</sup> The European Company Surveys (ECS) provide data on why and how companies make use of a wide variety of working time arrangements. The European Company Survey (ECS) has been carried out regularly since its inception in 2004–2005 as the European Establishment Survey on Working Time and Work-Life Balance (ESWT).<sup>21</sup> The European Working Conditions Surveys (EWCS) look at the organization of working time across the EU and related issues, including flexible arrangements, working time preferences, and work-life balance.<sup>22</sup>

At the community level, there have been no paternity or sick leave regulations, except for absences due to force majeure (urgent family matters, fortuitous events). Therefore, the European Union has initiated work to improve work-life balance solutions for parents and carers and to increase their use by men. The aim of the work is to prevent the complete withdrawal of women from the labor market and achieve a more balanced distribution of caring roles between women and men.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Eurofound, “European Quality of Life Surveys (EQLS),” accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-quality-of-life-surveys>.

<sup>21</sup> Eurofound, “European Company Surveys,” accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/surveys/european-company-surveys>.

<sup>22</sup> Eurofound, “Work-life balance,” accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/work-life-balance>.

<sup>23</sup> Katarzyna Siemienkiewicz, “Jak dyrektwa work-life balance zmieni polski Kodeks pracy?” in *Odwaga i równowaga czyli work-life balance po polsku* (Warsaw: Karta różnorodności koordynowana przez Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2020), 71.

#### 4. Implementation of the Directive into the Polish Legal System – Changes in Labor Laws

It should be emphasized that although the deadline for implementing the EU directive on work-life balance for parents and carers<sup>24</sup> expired on August 1, 2022, the amendment to the Labour Code introducing the provisions of the above directive entered into force on April 26, 2023. It is worth noting that some solutions contained in the directive exist in the Polish legal order, and some assumptions are new or recommend using more favorable solutions than those currently in force in Polish legislation. This is the case with parental leave, regulated by the Labour Code, where the directive provides more favorable provisions, which means that parental leave will be extended. One of the goals of the work-life balance directive is to increase fathers' participation in childcare. For this reason, each parent is only entitled to 9 weeks of parental leave. They cannot transfer it to the other parent. However, they can use it simultaneously. Their leave is then added up. If this leave is not taken, it will be forfeited. It is projected that fathers will be more likely to request parental leave under this amendment to avoid losing their entitlement to this paid leave.<sup>25</sup> A significant change brought about by the directive is the introduction of a carers' leave, under which each employee will be entitled to five days off work a year. Currently, Article 188 § 1 of the Labour Code provides only for an exemption from work for the care of a child under 14 years of age for 16 hours or two days while retaining the right to remuneration. The directive extends this right to other persons. Under Articles 173<sup>1</sup> to 173<sup>3</sup> of the Labour Code, according to the proposed provision, an employee will be entitled to a care leave during a calendar year to provide personal care or support to a person who is a family member or lives in the same household and who requires care or support for serious medical reasons, for five days. This leave will be used whole or in parts. A son, daughter, mother, father, or spouse will be considered a family member.<sup>26</sup> Due to the ageing of the population and the resulting dissemination of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Article 5 Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU (O.J.E.C. L188).

<sup>26</sup> Ustawa z dnia 9 marca 2023 r. o zmianie ustawy – Kodeks pracy oraz niektórych innych ustaw (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland, Journal of Laws 2023, item 641).

age-related restrictions, a constant increase in the need for care is expected, as noted in the directive's preamble. A new solution is also the introduction of force majeure leave to ensure that every worker is entitled to leave from work for urgent family reasons in the event of illness or accident, which makes the worker's immediate assistance essential. Article 148<sup>1</sup> of the Labour Code states that an employee will be entitled to leave from work due to force majeure for two days or 16 hours during a calendar year while retaining the right to half of their remuneration.<sup>27</sup> Member states may limit any worker's right to time off work on grounds of force majeure to a certain period each year, by case, or both.<sup>28</sup> The directive also provides for facilitations in the flexible organization of work. Flexible working conditions for employees who are parents or carers mean that employees can adjust their work schedule, including by using remote work, flexible work schedules, or reduced working hours.<sup>29</sup> Article 188<sup>1</sup> of the Labour Code states that an employee raising a child may submit an application for flexible work organization in paper or electronic form until that child is eight years old. The Code defines what flexible work organization is and includes telework.<sup>30</sup> The Europeanization literature underscores that directives include in-built means for member states to implement and transpose EU directives suited to their domestic institutions. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of looking not only at legal implementation but also at practical implementation, which involves the "domestication" of directives, that is, how different political and societal actors, with different aims, play a role in adapting EU law to domestic institutions.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Article 7 Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU (O.J.E.C. L188).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Article 9.

<sup>30</sup> Articles 139, 140<sup>1</sup>, 142, 143, and 144 of Ustawa z dnia 26 czerwca 1974 r. Kodeks pracy (The Constitution of the Republic of Poland, Journal of Laws 1974, No. 24, item 141).

<sup>31</sup> Karolina de la Porte et al., "The EU's Work-Life Balance Directive: Institutional Change of Father-Specific Leave across Member States," *Social Policy Administration* 57, no. 4 (July 2023): 552.

## 5. Main Problems and Challenges in Human Resource Management in Public Administration – WLB Solutions

Public administration in our country faces many problems and challenges in human resource management. Issues related to the post-pandemic reality, demography, ageing society, equality, and increasing the number and activation of women in the labour market relate to general problems of human resource management in the EU and globally. Assuming that people are the most important resource of an organization, or public administration in this case, the work-life balance issues become the key element of the human resource management strategy. Moreover, considering its mission and the need to function continuously and sustainably, public administration is obliged to take action to minimize risks in human resource management. The benefits of implementing work-life policy recorded in the private sector can also be directly applied to the public sector. Given the current problems and challenges facing public administration in human resource management, benchmarking activities are fully justified.

### 5.1. The COVID-19 Pandemic – A Hybrid Work Model

The COVID-19 pandemic forced both employees and employers to verify and look at the labor market and WLB issues from a different perspective. A study on living and working during the pandemic (Eurofound's e-survey, *Living, working and COVID-19*) showed that the work-life balance worries related to home life have worsened.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the latest round of the e-survey indicates a sharp decline in family time among workers.<sup>33</sup> The latest findings, published in July 2022, show that despite some improvement in work-life balance, almost 30% of workers reported that their job is preventing them from spending time with their family, compared to a significantly lower figure of 19% in 2020.<sup>34</sup> The pandemic has also forced

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<sup>32</sup> In 2020, 20% of men and 25% of women reported they were too tired to do household jobs after work, while the corresponding figures for 2022 are 32% and 41%, respectively. Eurofound, *Fifth Round of the Living, Working and COVID-19 E-survey: Living in a New Era of Uncertainty* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2022), 5.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* In 2020, 19% of men and women reported that their jobs prevented them from spending time with their families; in 2022, 30% of men and 29% of women expressed this opinion.

<sup>34</sup> Eurofound, "Work-life balance," accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/topic/work-life-balance>.

changes in the way we work. The need to work remotely or in a hybrid mode has permanently changed the possibilities and approach of both employers and employees to work. Undoubtedly, many changes in this sphere have taken place in public administration. The initial difficulties associated with pandemic restrictions and the transition to remote work from the public administration perspective seem to reveal new opportunities and create a chance to make changes involving digital transformation. Performing work remotely also created opportunities to verify the capabilities, needs, and expectations of public administration human resources in this area and to introduce changes related to hybrid work performance.

A survey conducted during the pandemic among public administration employees in Poland shows that 54.4% of respondents stated that the pandemic significantly influenced the functioning of their institutions, and 41.2% said that the state of the pandemic significantly influenced the way they performed their official duties. When the pandemic began, 83.4% of respondents started working remotely, including 31.5% working exclusively at home. Almost half (49.2%) of employees said remote work was not done in their workplace before the pandemic. Another 40.6% answered that it was used occasionally. Only 10.2% of respondents indicated that remote work took place often and very often. Moving on to the assessment of remote work and the attitude towards performing it in the future, let us note that as many as 76.5% of the officials interviewed rated their experiences in remote work as very good or good. It is worth emphasizing that many employees would like to continue working remotely after the pandemic. However, a preference for full-time remote work was declared by 25.4% of respondents. Still, 47.5% of surveyed employees would be willing to work remotely. Preference for remote work in the future was declared by employees without minor children in the household – 77.6% of respondents would like to do some or all of their work remotely, and among people taking care of children – 67.1% in total. The vast majority of employees considered their remote work conditions good (36.2% very good and 39.5% good). More than half of employees (50.3%) had no problems with remote work tools. The rest reported sporadic problems related mainly to technical aspects of using ICT systems. The most frequently highlighted problem was the quality of the system infrastructure. It is worth noting that remote working conditions were rated higher by employees without minor children

in the household – 39.3% very good and 41.3% good. Among respondents with minor children in the household – 32.3% and 37.3%, respectively. The benefits of remote work included “better time management” (62%), “focusing only on a specific task (without being distracted by other tasks)” (49%), “the ability to work in a more pleasant environment of one’s own housing” (40%), and “the possibility of taking care of household matters at the same time” (36%). According to the respondents, a significant advantage is eliminating commuting to work and saving time and money. As a result, 76.5% of the officials interviewed rated their experiences in remote work as very positive and positive, and a large proportion would like to continue remote work after the end of the pandemic. There is an increase in flexibility and a necessary departure from rigid regulations at the level of the employment contract, as 25.4% of respondents declared their willingness to switch to remote working mode permanently. Partial remote work would be performed by 47.5% of surveyed employees.<sup>35</sup> In the report’s summary, a *de lege ferenda* proposal was made to amend the Labour Code regarding the sanctioning of remote work.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the organization of working time should ensure the health, safety, and gender equality of employees, as well as be “family-friendly” and allow employees to co-decide about their working hours.<sup>36</sup> Flexible working conditions are among the most important factors for employees when choosing a workplace and maintaining job satisfaction. Therefore, employers who decide to offer their employees, for example, the possibility of remote work or flexible working hours, will become more attractive and will have a greater chance of bringing and retaining the best employees. McKinsey research<sup>37</sup> revealed that 94% of Polish mothers who do not work want to return to the labor market. However, 70% are concerned about combining professional work with childcare. For 67% of respondents, the solution

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<sup>35</sup> Jarosław Szczepański and Łukasz Zamecki, *Praca zdalna w administracji publicznej w czasie pandemii COVID-19* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Nauki o Polityce, 2021), 13–25.

<sup>36</sup> Gotowska, “Work life balance,” 66.

<sup>37</sup> McKinsey & Company, *Win-win: How Empowering Women Can Benefit Central and Eastern Europe*, 2021.

would be introducing flexible working hours, while for 48%, it would be remote work.<sup>38</sup>

To encourage working parents and carers to remain in the workforce, those workers should be able to adapt their working schedules to their personal needs and preferences. Therefore, working parents and carers should be able to request flexible working arrangements, meaning the possibility for workers to adjust their working patterns, including remote working arrangements, flexible working schedules, or a reduction in working hours, for caring purposes. To address the needs of workers and employers, it should be possible for the EU member states to limit the duration of flexible working arrangements, including a reduction in working hours. While working part-time has been shown to be useful in allowing some women to remain in the labor market after having children, long periods of reduced working hours may lead to lower social security contributions, translating into reduced or non-existing pension entitlements. The ultimate decision to accept or reject a worker's flexible work arrangement request should lie with the employer. Specific circumstances underlying the need for flexible working arrangements can change. Workers should, therefore, not only have the right to return to their original working patterns at the end of a given agreed period but also be able to request to do so at any time when a change in the underlying circumstances necessitates it.<sup>39</sup>

Subsequently, this indicated that working from home and being engaged at work favorably and significantly impacted work-life balance. Individuals who remained productive while working from home exhibited an enhancement in their work and life, and dedication at work was shown to help in achieving work-life balance. These results can enable the public sector to properly plan the work-from-home concept that will improve work-life

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<sup>38</sup> "Dyrektywa work-life balance wchodzi w życie! Czy to szansa dla przepracowanych polskich rodziców?," April 26, 2023, INFOR PL S.A., accessed April 26, 2023, <https://kadry.infor.pl/kodeks-pracy/czas-pracy/5731196,dyrektywa-worklife-balance.html>.

<sup>39</sup> Article 9 of Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU (O.J.E.C. L188).

balance.<sup>40</sup> Hybrid work is common in public administration (32%).<sup>41</sup> On the work front, it is evident that with the reopening of society, people would return to their place of work. While it was widely predicted that teleworking was here to stay and that the pandemic would trigger a work-from-home revolution that would permanently change the future of work, by spring 2022, many e-survey respondents were working exclusively at their workplace again. Yet, the respondents' preference seems to have been to continue to telework daily or several times a week. The proportion expressing this preference is highest among those aged 30–44, who typically have young children.<sup>42</sup> In light of the aforementioned changes in the labor market, the development of future WLB policies must include a spectrum of directions, such as customization of working hours under WFH (working from “home”), ensuring trust and support for WFH employees, responding to the demands to work from the office, and guaranteeing equal pay and the right to disconnect.<sup>43</sup> The literature includes several studies that stress the importance of the flexibility conferred by teleworking on motivation since it can help people carry out their work activities in a more friendly and pleasant environment. Public administration employees are generally strongly motivated by the possibilities offered by teleworking to improve work-life balance. However, there are doubts about whether teleworkers can manage this alternative form of work organization to improve their lives effectively.<sup>44</sup> There is clear continuity around personal work benefits and satisfaction, balancing working and personal life and having some control over work. This includes evidence of increasing productivity when telework becomes flexible but not dominant in working life. The introduction of telework is having, and will continue to have, a notable impact on

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<sup>40</sup> Nur Izzatul Afifah and Aryana Satrya, “Work–Life Balance in the Public Sector: The Effect of Work from Home and Work Engagement,” in *Contemporary Research on Management and Business*, ed. Siska Noviaristanti (London: CRC Press/Taylor & Francis Group, 2022), 123.

<sup>41</sup> Eurofound, *Fifth Round*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>43</sup> Lynna Vyas, “‘New Normal’ at Work in a Post-COVID World: Work–Life Balance and Labor Markets,” *Policy and Society* 41, no. 1 (March 2022): 163.

<sup>44</sup> Cesar Madureira and Belén Rando, “Teleworking in Portuguese Public Administration during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Advantages, Disadvantages, Work-Life Balance and Motivation,” *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation* 16, no. 2 (2022): 123.



public sector organizations, including the need for new rules for telework, social and personal factors, and the need for adequate infrastructure and competences, in other words, an organizational change. With COVID-19 as the tipping point, teleworking has become mainstream, also in the public sector.<sup>45</sup>

## 5.2. Demography – Changes in the Structure of Society

Demographic changes, including the ageing of the population and the associated increase in demand for informal care, also form the background of the regulations introduced by the WLB directive. These regulations take into account the need to promote a high level of employment in the Union and keep workers connected with the labor market.<sup>46</sup> The increase in dual-earner families and changes in family structures, such as the increase in single-parent families, have brought the work-life balance into the agenda of national and European Union policies.<sup>47</sup> The importance of problems and changes is felt throughout the structures of the European Union. The impact on society in the Union is likely to be a major factor in the changes ahead. Consistently low birth rates (“ageing at the bottom”) and longer life expectancy (“ageing at the top”) change the shape of the age pyramid, and then the change will result from entering the older structure. This brings about demographic change in the EU, where the working-age population is declining, and the relative number of pensioners is increasing.<sup>48</sup> A generally

<sup>45</sup> Noella Edelmann and Jeremy Millard, “Telework Development Before, during and after COVID-19, and Its Relevance for Organizational Change in the Public Sector,” ICEGOV ‘21: 14th International Conference on Theory and Practice of Electronic Governance, October 2021, 441–2.

<sup>46</sup> Joanna Dudek, “Work-Life Balance – An EU Perspective,” HRlaw.pl, May 16, 2022, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://hrlaw.pl/en/work-life-balance-an-eu-perspective/>.

<sup>47</sup> Timo Anttila et al., “Working-Time Regimes and Work-Life Balance in Europe,” *European Sociological Review* 31, no. 6 (2015): 714.

<sup>48</sup> The population of the EU on 1 January 2021 was estimated at 447.2 million. Young people (0 to 14 years old) made up 15.1% of the EU’s population, while people considered to be of working age (15 to 64 years old) accounted for 64.1% of the population. Older people (aged 65 or over) had a 20.8% share (an increase of 0.2 percentage points (pp) compared with the previous year and an increase of 3 pp compared with 10 years earlier). To compare, in 2020, the three population groups, young people (0 to 14 years old), working age (15 to 64 years old) and older people (aged 65 and over) represented, respectively, 15.1%, 64.3%,

increasing trend can be observed for the EU's old-age and total dependency ratios.<sup>49</sup>

Population ageing is a long-term trend which began several decades ago in Europe. Consistently low birth rates and higher life expectancy are transforming the shape of the EU's age pyramid; probably the most important change will be the marked transition towards a much older population structure, a development which is already apparent in several EU member states. This is reflected in an increasing share of older people coupled with a declining share of working-age people in the total population. During the period from 2021 to 2100, the share of the population of working age is expected to decline, while older people will probably account for an increasing share of the total population: those aged 65 years or over will account for 31.3% of the EU's population by 2100, compared with 20.8% in 2021.<sup>50</sup>

Unfortunately, the negative effects of the changing structure of society are also noticeable in Poland. The statistics unambiguously and unequivocally reveal the problems that the public administration is already facing, and the above problems will only increase in the future. The Polish population will decline by approximately seven million by 2070. The main cause of this change is a decline in the total fertility rate (TFR) in recent decades, from a level close to ensuring a stable population in 1990 (2.06 live births per woman) to 1.36 in 2019. According to the Eurostat projections, fertility will increase to 1.65 in 2070, but it will remain well below the natural replacement rate. The old-age dependency ratio would increase from about 29% in 2019 to 68% in 2070.<sup>51</sup>

The 2021 General Population Census results indicate significant changes in the population structure by economic age groups. As a result of

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and 20.6% of the EU's population. Eurostat, "Population Structure and Ageing," accessed February 10, 2023, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population\\_structure\\_and\\_ageing#The\\_share\\_of\\_elderly\\_people\\_continues\\_to\\_increase](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Population_structure_and_ageing#The_share_of_elderly_people_continues_to_increase).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. The old-age dependency ratio increased by 5.9 pp during the past decade (from 26.6% in 2011 to 32.5% in 2021), while the total dependency ratio increased by 6.3 pp over the same period (from 49.7% in 2011 to 56.0% in 2021).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> European Economy Institutional Papers, *The 2021 Ageing Report: Economic and Budgetary Projections for the EU Member States (2019–2070)*, Country Fiche on public pensions for the Ageing Report 2021 – Poland, Brussels: 2021, 14.

unfavorable demographic trends, the percentage of people of pre-working age has decreased. In the 2021 census, the share of the total population aged 0–17 was 18.4%, compared to 18.7% in the 2011 census. The main reason for the decrease in the number of people in the pre-working age group was the low number of live births (by over 2.2 million), and the percentage (by 3.0 percentage points) of the working age population also decreased. On the other hand, the share of the post-working age population increased significantly, from 16.9% to 22.3%, i.e. by more than 5 percentage points. This means that nearly 2 million people in the age group 60/65 and more have arrived within a decade, and thus more than every fifth inhabitant of Poland is over 60 years old. As a result of changes in economic age groups, the dependency ratio increased. This means that in 2021, for every 100 people of working age, there were 69 people of non-working age, nearly 14 people more than in 2011.<sup>52</sup> According to the preliminary report of Statistics Poland (GUS), based on the census results, the number of people of working age decreased by 2.2 million in 2021 compared to the situation 10 years before. At the same time, in the last decade, there have been almost 2 million seniors (women aged 60 and over and men 65 and over). Forecasts are not optimistic. According to the European Commission's report, *The 2021 Ageing Report: Economic & Budgetary Projections for the EU Member States (2019–2070)*, the population of Poland will decrease by almost 20% before 2070. In addition, an increase in the old-age dependency ratio can be expected, an indicator showing the number of people at retirement age compared to the number of people at working age. According to the report's authors, Poland will have one of the highest ratios in the EU, which will exceed 65%. The same report indicates that the labor force in Poland will decrease by at least a third by 2070. In this respect, our country is among six EU countries where this problem is the most urgent. The situation in which fewer and fewer employees have to support an increasing number of retirees raises concerns about the amount of benefits.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Report on Preliminary Results of the National Census of Population and Housing 2021*, Warsaw: 2022, 24–5.

<sup>53</sup> Marcin Jendrzyczak, "Pogarszają się prognozy demograficzne dla Polski," FORSAL.PL, August 31, 2022, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://forsal.pl/gospodarka/demografia/artykuly/8525768,pogarszaja-sie-prognozy-demograficzne-dla-polski.html>.

An important issue related to changing demographics is recruiting employees from a significantly limited pool of candidates in the labor market by the public administration. Equally important are the changing patterns and expectations of young people entering the labor market. Generations Y and Z are setting new patterns in human resource management. The generation born in the 1980s and early 1990s is estimated to be the fastest-growing segment of the current workforce. Today's public sector HR professionals would be hard-pressed to take lightly the needs, desires, and attitudes of a generation from which public managers will be mining future employees. Their philosophy is to live first and then work. One of the criteria in choosing an employer is lifestyle. Generation Y is better educated and more tech-savvy than previous generations, but managing them in the workplace poses unique challenges to employers. Undoubtedly, it can be said that they are much more aware of the role of maintaining a balance between work and private life. Consequently, they also have high expectations towards the employer to understand the essence of this balance and enable it to be maintained. Generation Y members not only want flexible hours and schedules but also remote work options because of their perception of the never-ending intersection of work and life. They see themselves doing work everywhere except in a cubicle. Jobs must be designed to accommodate these workers' personal lives, not the other way around.<sup>54</sup> Even greater changes in attitudes and views that will affect the shape of the future labor market are presented by Generation Z. This is the generation of people born after 1995, i.e. currently entering the labor market and in the process of education. We learn from research that when choosing a workplace, the most important criterion for representatives of Generation Z is a good atmosphere and relations with people, a good location, and quick access to work, while employment stability comes only third. The importance of flexible working time is growing compared to previous generations. It is also relevant that the interest in work under employment contracts has decreased significantly. They are the first generation brought up entirely in the times

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<sup>54</sup> Joe Jarret, "American Society for Public Administration, Generation Y and the Work-life Balance: Challenges for Public Sector HR Professionals," *PA Times*, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://patimes.org/generation-work-life-balance-challenges-public-sector-hr-professionals/>.

of a market economy shaped under neoliberal influences. The dominant narrative is permeated with the concepts of self-made man, creative industries, and the myth of Silicon Valley, which results in the popularity of start-ups and the desire to run your own business. It can be assumed that in the future, many more people from Generation Z will want to run their own businesses than their predecessors did. Young people prefer flexible forms of employment or self-employment, as they associate it with freedom and self-determination.<sup>55</sup> In this context, the introduction of WLB solutions seems to be a strategic move in human resource management. Creating the image of public administration as an attractive employer understanding and meeting the needs of the future generation of employees is part of employer branding activities, which, given the current trends in the changing number of potential job candidates, is necessary.

### 5.3. Equality, Increasing Number and Activation of Women in the Labor Market

The reconciliation of work and life is considered a priority in the European Union in achieving gender equality, fostered by increasing women's participation in the labor market and promoting the sharing of household duties (childcare) between women and men. Reconciling these spheres of life was a key element in achieving the primary goal of the Europe 2020 strategy, i.e. raising the employment rate of women and men aged 20–64 to 75%. The Strategy for equality between women and men 2010–2015, adopted by the Commission, emphasizes that economic independence is a prerequisite for taking control of one's life for both women and men. Facilitating the effective reconciliation of work and life for both women and men is a key factor in increasing their participation in the labor market, especially given the contemporary demographic problems.<sup>56</sup>

A major goal of the WLB directive is to make it easier for parents and carers to combine work and private life, achieve gender equality in employment, and work towards a balanced sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women. On the one hand, attention is drawn to the difficulties of reconciling professional and family responsibilities, contributing

<sup>55</sup> Karolina Messyasz, "Pokolenie Z na rynku pracy – strukturalne uwarunkowania i oczekiwania," *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis, Folia Sociologic* 76 (2021): 105–11.

<sup>56</sup> Hildt-Ciupińska, "Work-life," 15.

to women's under-representation in the labor market. A point is made that women with children or sick or dependant relatives usually devote much of their time to unpaid caring duties. This has a negative impact on women's employment – women in this situation often devote less time to paid work or withdraw from the labor market altogether. On the other hand, it is emphasized that men need to be encouraged to share care responsibilities more equally. It is crucial here to tackle inequalities that perpetuate gender stereotypes and widen gender gaps in work and care. The frequently discussed right of the father to participate in the upbringing of his child and the benefits to the child of care provided by both parents are also important in this context.<sup>57</sup> The Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) statistics show that in 2021, only 1% of men took parental leave, and only 55% took paternity leave. Men collected 31% of care benefits paid in Poland in 2021. The IQS study indicated that financial issues, fears related to loss of job and salary, and limited opportunities for promotion are the key barriers to the use of parental leave by fathers. Almost one in three fathers believe that a man taking leave will be unwelcome in their workplace. Interestingly, one in five did not receive consent from their partner.<sup>58</sup> According to the latest Pracuj.pl study, as many as 85% of working parents appreciate the amendment to the Labour Code, which introduces an additional nine-week parental leave for fathers. This change has a chance to translate into tangible support for mothers and relieve them of some of their responsibilities. However, 53% of working fathers fear their employer would view such a benefit negatively.<sup>59</sup> Undoubtedly, women are important to the public sector as one-third of working women are employed in the public sector, compared to every sixth man.<sup>60</sup> The percentage of women employed in Poland in the public sector is significantly higher than in the private sector, as confirmed by GUS data for

<sup>57</sup> Dudek, "Work-Life Balance," accessed February 10, 2023, <https://hrlaw.pl/en/work-life-balance-an-eu-perspective/>.

<sup>58</sup> "Zaledwie 1% ojców korzysta z urlopu rodzicielskiego a tylko ponad połowa z ojcowskiego," *legalis administracja*, September 24, 2023, accessed September 24, 2023, <https://gov.legalis.pl/zaledwie-1-ojcow-korzysta-z-urlopu-rodzicielskiego-a-tylko-ponad-polowa-z-ojcowskiego/>.

<sup>59</sup> Grażyna J. Leśniak, "Tata na (nowym) rodzicielskim – badanie Pracuj.pl," *Prawo.pl*, February 9, 2023, accessed February 9, 2023, <https://www.prawo.pl/kadry/urlop-rodzicielski-dla-ojcow-badanie-pracujpl,519732.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Kobiety i mężczyźni na rynku pracy* (Warsaw: 2018), 7.

years. It should be considered whether the directive solutions significantly affect the situation of women in the labor market and whether the introduced changes correspond to the needs of the domestic market. This is an important issue from the point of view of public administration, for which women constitute a significant part of its human resources. According to the results of the 2022 survey, more than half (60.9%) of the economically inactive people were women. The unemployment rate in the male population was lower than in the female population.<sup>61</sup> GUS statistics clearly indicate that the position of women in the labor market is unstable and requires a number of changes. Family responsibilities are the second reason for Polish women's economic inactivity after retirement. Additionally, 16.5% of women work part-time due to caring for children or other people. Women's salary is 26% lower than men's in the group of "representatives of public authorities, senior officials, and managers". This is the occupational group with the highest difference. The arduousness of work is the only type of risk affecting more women than men.<sup>62</sup> In the period between the censuses, the proportions of the population by sex did not change significantly, and men constitute 48.3% of the total population (women 51.7%). The feminization rate varies with the age of the population; men predominate in numbers up to the age of 48 (with a ratio of 99.6); in the population from the age of 49, there are already over 100 women per 100 men, and in the oldest groups (aged 85 and more) – 260. The age limit for the numerical predominance of men moved by two years compared to the 2011 census, when more men than women were recorded up to the age of 46.<sup>63</sup>

According to the European Commission, the gender gap in the labor market is most pronounced in the case of parents and people with caring responsibilities. Women, more often than men, assume the role of informal carers of elderly or dependant relatives. Also, assuming the role of a parent who takes care of the child to a greater extent, in the case of women, has a greater impact on their situation in the labor market, and it is the second, after retirement, cause of the professional inactivity of women in Poland.

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<sup>61</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Pracujący, bezrobotni i bierni zawodowo (wyniki wstępne Badań Aktywności Ekonomicznej Ludności)* (Warsaw: 2022), 7.

<sup>62</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Kobiety*, 7–16.

<sup>63</sup> Główny Urząd Statystyczny, *Report*, 21–2.

Therefore, the European Union has initiated work to improve work-life balance solutions for parents and carers and to increase their use by men. The aim of the work is to prevent the complete withdrawal of women from the labor market and achieve a more balanced division of caring roles between women and men.<sup>64</sup>

According to the 2021 Future Collars report, *Working titans. Women in the labour market in the age of digital transformation*, two-thirds (67%) of the surveyed women believe that women and men are not treated equally by employers in Poland. Also, almost two out of three respondents believe that women do not have equal opportunities for professional development (63%) or promotion (64%) compared to men. Nearly 60% of respondents believe that household and parental responsibilities hinder their professional development. This view is shared by women in all the surveyed age groups, and it is common to respondents regardless of their level of education and income. According to women, the motivation to change jobs is mainly the possibility of obtaining a higher salary (61%). Every third woman would be convinced to change jobs by better working conditions (33%) and a convenient location (32%).<sup>65</sup>

A critical element of professional life is the organization of working time. It affects family life, determining the amount and distribution of time for relatives. The research shows significant differences in the degree of involvement of women and men in caring responsibilities. Of course, it is mainly women who quit their jobs or have to reduce their professional activities to care for their children. This is not due to gender discrimination but is often related to the place of employment and occupations performed by women, which are characterized by a lower degree of flexibility in employment.<sup>66</sup> The long-standing challenges related to women's labor market participation have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Employment rates in the first year of the pandemic declined for both sexes, but women experienced a steeper fall in working hours than men during the lockdowns.

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<sup>64</sup> Siemienkiewicz, "Jak dyrektwa," 71.

<sup>65</sup> Mariola Błażej, "Kobiety na rynku pracy w nowoczesnych technologiach," Thinkstat NASK, March 18, 2022, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://thinkstat.pl/aktualnosci/kobiety-na-ryнку-pracy-w-nowoczesnych-technologiach>.

<sup>66</sup> Gotowska, "Work life," 68.



Women of childbearing age (aged 25–49) had the lowest chance of obtaining a job in the summer of 2020. The COVID-19 crisis clearly affected the employment of workers in part-time schemes and on temporary contracts, both of which are particularly widespread among women. Female employment plays a vital role in a gender-sensitive post-COVID recovery. In 2021, EU leaders committed to stepping up the fight against gender discrimination. In a similar vein, Council Conclusions, approved in June 2021, called for stepping up gender equality policies and strengthening the empowerment of women and girls as a political priority, especially in the context of responding to the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath.<sup>67</sup> Attention should also be paid to the effects of the pandemic on women's health and general well-being. Data from the fifth e-survey shows that almost one in four women (24%) in spring 2022 reported unmet mental health care needs, up from one in five (21%) in spring 2021. The problem was less widespread among men, both in 2021 (18%) and in 2022 (19%).<sup>68</sup> Looking ahead, it will remain important to counter the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially given that studies show that the socio-economic impact of the crisis might last much longer for women than for men. In order to counter any further setbacks and empower women economically, the Commission has set the target to halve the gender employment gap by 2030 through the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. Women can only thrive in the labor market and contribute fully if their opportunities in and access to the labor market are facilitated with concrete actions.<sup>69</sup> As the pandemic progressed, the most considerable increase among parents reporting they were too tired after work to do household tasks was found among women with young children, particularly those who worked only from home.<sup>70</sup>

Also, issues related to the pension system will not be distributed evenly. Women will be particularly affected. They are more likely to interrupt their careers to care for their children and sometimes to look after their parents. On average, they also earn less than men, reach retirement age

<sup>67</sup> European Commission, *2022 Report on Gender Equality in the EU* (Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg: 2022), 21.

<sup>68</sup> Eurofound, *Fifth round*, 7.

<sup>69</sup> European Commission, *2022 Report*, 68.

<sup>70</sup> Eurofound, *Living, working and COVID-19: Mental health and trust decline across EU as pandemic enters another year* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2021), 3.

earlier, and live longer. As a result of the combination of these factors, they are particularly affected by the problems of the pension system.<sup>71</sup> Consequently, arrangements such as job sharing, part-time work, reduced hours or term-time work, and sick leave to care for a family member are mostly used by low-paid, predominantly female workers in clerical and lower administrative jobs. They are very rarely used at the top level of public sector organizations. A profound cultural change is needed to enhance the use of work-life balance measures by men and senior managers.<sup>72</sup>

Analysis of the current situation of women in the labor market suggests that the directive solutions seem to be the minimum to activate women and create appropriate conditions to ensure a proper balance between professional and private life, enabling them to stay in the labor market as long as possible. However, experts say that the draft implementation of the directive to Polish conditions should contain more solutions, for example, from the preamble to these EU regulations. The directive aims to improve the work-life balance, which in practice means more female involvement in professional life and male in private life. In this context, the directive discusses developing public services that relieve women of unpaid work to care for children and other family members.<sup>73</sup> Such solutions were not included directly in the provisions introducing the directive into the Polish legal order.

## **6. Human Resource Management in the Civil Service Corps as an Example of Applying the WLB Policy in Public Administration**

Applying the WLB directive solutions in public administration will be related to labor laws generally applicable to all categories of employees. Considering the specificity of public administration and its human resources,

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<sup>71</sup> Jendrzeczek, “Pogarszają się prognozy demograficzne dla Polski”, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://forsal.pl/gospodarka/demografia/artykuly/8525768.pogarszaja-sie-prognozy-demograficzne-dla-polski.html>.

<sup>72</sup> “Work-Life Balance and Family-Friendly Policies and Practices Are Available and Equally Used by Men and Women, Including at the Top,” OECD, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.oecd.org/gender/governance/toolkit/public-administration/gender-sensitive-employment-systems/work-life-balance/>.

<sup>73</sup> “Dyrektywa work-life balance niewdrożona, ale już działa,” *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, November 15, 2022, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://kadry.infor.pl/kodeks-pracy/przepisy-ogolne/5609546,dyrektywa-worklife-balance.html>.

a policy of work-life balance should be created that would be appropriate to its specificity but also adequate to the needs of employees in this sector and taking into account the tangible challenges and problems and the future concerning the management of public administration human resources.

A good example of WLB solutions functioning in public administration is the activities undertaken in the civil service corps. Human resource management standards applicable to the civil service contain recommendations regarding WLB, as well as a catalogue of specific tools recommended to be used in offices. The development and implementation of available solutions in sustainability policy is recommended with the participation of employees as a result of a dialogue. The importance of analysing the needs and demographic statistics of employees (e.g. generational diversity, gender) is emphasized to more effectively adjust the work-life balance tool to the needs of employees and the capabilities of offices, as well as cataloguing, describing, disseminating, and promoting information about tools used in the office.

The areas in which WLB solutions should be used include working time and work organization (e.g. flexible working time, telework), commuting to work (e.g. parking space, room or bicycle racks in the office), caring for a child or a dependant person (e.g. a room for a parent with a child, the possibility of coming to work with a child, subsidies to a nursery, kindergarten or children's club), leisure (e.g. co-financing for holidays, discounts for stays in holiday resorts), sport, recreation, and free time (e.g. sports cards or co-financing of sports and recreation activities, surcharge for tickets to cultural events), integration and communication (e.g. internal communication and exchange of information between employees), health and medical care (e.g. taking care of ergonomic and comfortable – higher than standard – working conditions, activities promoting a healthy lifestyle), and material support (e.g. assistance in case of fortuitous events, loans for housing).<sup>74</sup>

Activities undertaken in the civil service aim to promote knowledge about the balance policy, its meaning, and its role. Work is still underway to expand the base of available WLB tools and disseminate examples

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<sup>74</sup> Ordinance No. 6<sup>1</sup> of the Head of Civil Service of 12th March 2020 concerning the standards of human resources management in the civil service.

of best practices. The best work-life balance practices are promoted in the civil service, and the offices that apply them are distinguished. In 2021, a competition for the best work-life balance practices was organized, in which 16 offices submitted 46 practices. The assumption of the competition was to increase the number of offices that will use such solutions, and the existing activities will be improved and developed. It is assumed that thanks to this, employees will be more motivated, effective, and satisfied with their work, and the civil service will be perceived as a friendly and attractive workplace, also by people with special needs. Ten practices from nine offices qualified for the finals of the competition. The finalists presented them in two categories during the Final Gala on November 16, 2021. The general category included the following practices: Take care of your mental health – Agreement with the Wolskie Mental Health Centre (Office of the Patient Ombudsman), Cafeteria system (Ministry of Finance), With a parent to work (Statistical Office in Kielce), Psychological corner (Chamber of Tax Administration in Opole), Age Management Policy at the Lubuskie Voivodship Office in Gorzów Wielkopolski (Lubuske Voivodship Office in Gorzów Wielkopolski). The second category included practices that integrate office employees in a unique way: Appointment and activity of the Charity Council and the Diversity Ombudsman (Office of Rail Transport), Activity Zone and Relaxation Zone (Chancellery of the Prime Minister), Employee initiatives (Ministry of Funds and Regional Policy), Power of sport in the Lubuskie Voivodeship Office (Lubuskie Voivodeship Office in Gorzów Wielkopolski), Dog at work (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development).<sup>75</sup>

Some WLB practices, for instance, the possibility of coming to work with a child or a dog and the option of a psychologist's assistance with problems, are very popular with members of the civil service corps. Remote work and individual work schedules are becoming more and more popular tools that help reconcile private and work life. This is how directors general of offices try to attract employees. The pandemic has undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of remote work. At its peak, up to 42% of the official corps worked from home. It turns out that civil servants work from home

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<sup>75</sup> “Konkurs na najlepsze praktyki WLB,” gov.pl, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.gov.pl/web/sluzbacywilna/konkurs-na-najlepsze-praktyki-wlb>.

twice as often as other employees in the labor market in Poland. The head of the civil service himself believes that remote or hybrid work should be permanently available to the civil service corps. It increases the comfort of work, ensuring a balance between professional activity and private life, and enables employment in the administration of people whose health or personal situation precludes them from working outside their place of residence. The report of the head of the civil service shows that last year, due to the pandemic, people employed in ministries and the Chancellery of the Prime Minister (73%) and central administration offices (59%) most often worked from home. The lowest share of remote work was found in local administration offices (26%).<sup>76</sup>

Work on extending the WLB tools package used in the civil service is still in progress, which is the best example of understanding the importance and essence of such solutions for improving the quality of human resource management in public administration. The work-life balance policy implemented this way can use benchmarking among other public administration staff. In creating effective WLB solutions for public administration, it will be helpful to use the OECD recommendations for activities conducive to promoting WLB policy and gender equality. These include elaborating strategies to change the current perceptions about work-life balance measures – including at senior management levels – used mainly by low-level and low-income groups of employees; developing a deeper understanding and responsive actions about the perceptions of the detrimental impact of the use of work-life balance measures on employees’ career aspirations; incorporating part-time and other time flexibility options in career patterns; ensuring that employees who use workplace flexibility are not penalized for doing so; facilitating continuous support systems for family (child, disabled, elderly) members’ care to enable women’s and men’s full participation in the workforce and empower men to take on more family-related responsibilities; promoting part-time employment as a temporary rather than permanent solution for employees with family obligations; and developing

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<sup>76</sup> Katarzyna Wójcik, “Work-life balance w służbie cywilnej. Do pracy z psem albo z dzieckiem,” *Rzeczpospolita*, December 29, 2021, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.rp.pl/urzednicy/art19240851-work-life-balance-w-sluzbie-cywilnej-do-pracy-z-psem-albo-z-dzieckiem>.

policies and transition paths supporting the move from part-time to full-time work.<sup>77</sup>

## 7. Conclusions

This directive on work-life balance for parents and carers lays down minimum requirements designed to achieve equality between men and women with regard to labor market opportunities and treatment at work through facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life for working parents and carers, thereby giving EU member states the possibility to introduce or maintain provisions that are more favorable to workers.

For years, research has shown that improving work-life balance is crucial for employees. Employees are ready to give up higher earnings, professional development, or promotion in favor of improving the balance between work and private life.<sup>78</sup> The effective implementation of measures facilitating the reconciliation of work and life may contribute to improving employees' psychophysical health, general well-being, and efficiency, both in the sphere of work and beyond.<sup>79</sup> The global health crisis has made people pay more attention to health and hygiene, increasing the demand for healthy workplace cultures. WLB should take centre stage in developing labor policies in the post-pandemic working world. Balancing work and personal life is challenging both for employers and employees.<sup>80</sup> Given the benefits of the WLB policy and the challenges and threats faced by the public administration's human resource management, the directive provisions should be considered in a broader context and go beyond the established minimum. In answer to the first research question posed in this article, it should be stated that the directive provisions are a sound basis for further WLB solutions. However, in the face of the discussed problems of public administration, as research shows, the directive solutions

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<sup>77</sup> "Work-Life Balance and Family-Friendly Policies and Practices Are Available and Equally Used by Men and Women, Including at the Top," OECD, accessed February 10, 2023, <https://www.oecd.org/gender/governance/toolkit/public-administration/gender-sensitive-employment-systems/work-life-balance/>.

<sup>78</sup> Kelly Services, *Workers Preferences and Workplace Agility*, Kelly Global Workforce Index 2014, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Hildt-Ciupińska, "Work-life," 16.

<sup>80</sup> Vyas, "New Normal," 161–3.

are inadequate to the needs. For example, the percentage of fathers taking parental leave does not change, and women still face problems in the labor market (differences in earnings compared to men, greater burden of caring for their family, and working fewer hours). The possibility of flexible work is limited for various reasons, and the expectations and needs of staff in this area are much greater.

Appropriate legal solutions play a fundamental role in this process and will create a favorable environment for changes. The change in labor laws related to introducing the provisions of the discussed directive constitutes the basis for broader activities aimed at spreading awareness among employees and employers regarding the needs and benefits resulting from the WLB policy. At the state level, reconciliation of work and family life is embedded in employment, family, and gender equality policies. The postulate of going beyond the assumptions of the directive will be an expression of strategic thinking about human resource management in public administration, understanding the role of equality, and strengthening the position of women in the labor market. It may also be an employer branding tool.

The reality requires paying attention to the need for transformations that favor equality in the labor market but also outside it, taking measures to increase the involvement of men in parenthood and taking care of relatives, creating optimal conditions for women to combine professional life, and not giving it up for motherhood or caring for their family. The directive directly recommends disseminating knowledge among employees about the importance of the WLB policy, available tools, and benefits.<sup>81</sup> These activities require a systemic approach; the changes introduced by the directive in question should be the beginning of the ongoing transformation.

<sup>81</sup> It is worth paying attention to initiatives helping employers create, implement, and run family-carer-friendly support in the workplace. For example, Employers for Carers is an association of companies and organizations that run programmes supporting working family carers. It also conducts research and public education on the subject. Founded in 2009 as an employers' forum, it currently has over 145 member organizations from the public, private, and non-governmental sectors. It offers them (and new members) training and materials showing the next steps to be taken by introducing various assistance programmes and examples of good practice. Its activities can be an inspiration for Polish employers. Anna Janowicz, "Przykłady wyzwań i istniejących rozwiązań z zakresu work-life balance w kontekście opieki nad dorosłymi osobami zależnymi," in *Odwaga i równowaga czyli work-life balance po polsku* (Warsaw: Karta różnorodności koordynowana przez Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu, 2020), 95.

Unfortunately, these actions seem insufficient and do not bring the intended effect.<sup>82</sup> In answer to the next two questions, it is strongly recommended to take action to introduce WLB both in terms of expanding legal regulations and beyond the legal sphere. When introducing changes required by the EU directive, we should instead think about developing good practices that would show how to apply new and existing solutions (e.g. the right to a break for breastfeeding, the right to reduced working hours, or additional two days off to care for a child under 14 years of age) to improve the work-life balance of employees.<sup>83</sup> Undoubtedly, financing new solutions is a crucial issue, but the necessity and perspective of these activities should be taken into account. The question of how to finance the growing care needs of an ageing population has been a subject of discussion for years.

Being aware of the inevitable consequences of the changing structure of society, which significantly shapes the labor market, it is necessary to take immediate action to adapt public administration's human resource management to include WLB. Following the social trend and building an organizational culture related to parental equality and work-life balance for employees should be considered. This could be achieved by developing internal policies, conducting dialogue, and creating an atmosphere of comfort and understanding for both parents' desire to fulfil their role as parents and their ambitions to achieve their professional goals. As a result,

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<sup>82</sup> It is alleged that there are currently no plans to conduct information campaigns to raise awareness about the new entitlements although the need for information campaign was raised by the employers' organization expert who suggested that "change in regulations will not bring in the expected consequences, and an emphasis should be placed on promoting the solutions". At the same time the issue is not salient among the social partners: as the trade union expert mentioned: "we have not devoted much time to these parental leave entitlements". Extending the existing leave in the form of two nontransferable months with a low intention of the policymakers to introduce change can be classified as layering. In contrast to the Danish case, the purpose of parental leave in Poland, to enable mothers to take long leave, has not change despite formal compliance with the WLB directive. Poland, like Denmark, has made extensive changes, to reduce the pre-existing bias towards mothers in the system, and the compensation for leave is high. However, in Poland, these planned formal changes are de-coupled from the intention of the policymakers, which is to maintain traditional gender roles. Karolina de la Porte et al., "The EU's Work-Life Balance Directive," 558–9.

<sup>83</sup> Malwina Wrotniak, "Nadchodzi work-life balance dla Polaków. 'Pudrujemy trupa,'" *Bankier.pl*, October 20, 2022, accessed October 20, 2023, <https://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Work-life-balance-dla-Polakow-Pudrujemy-trupa-8423959.html>.



employees will be more motivated, productive, and connected to their employer, which is a clear benefit for the latter.<sup>84</sup> The example of the WLB policy used in the civil service corps illustrates the employees' need for such tools. Also, it confirms the need to introduce changes in those areas of public administration where the assumptions of the above policy are not yet popularized. The justification for taking such actions in the civil service may be indicated primarily by a high level of understanding and acceptance of the WLB policy, a change in the image of the civil service as a potential employer, and the creation of specific, high human resource management standards. Action aimed at achieving a work-life balance translates into measurable benefits not only in the economic but also in the social aspect, in the general well-being of the society in all spheres of life, also in the health dimension, which is very much needed in the era of intensified crises related to the COVID-19 pandemic or the ongoing war in Ukraine.

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<sup>84</sup> Dudek, "Work-Life Balance," accessed February 10, 2023, <https://hrlaw.pl/en/work-life-balance-an-eu-perspective/>.

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