**Gender aspects of teleworking**

**Intervention of Brigitta Zsura, Vice President of PERC Women Committee for the PERC /FES Meeting on New realities of labor in PERC region: remote work challenge and its regulation, 16 April**

PERC Women Committee has organized together with Belgium unions an activity about OHS and gender perspective in October 2020; we discussed about work -life balance, teleworking, digitalization, increase of domestic violence. Psychosocial aspects were also tackled including stress and increase in domestic violence.

Concerning gender aspects of Teleworking the EESC recently issued an opinion about this issue. I would like to mention some conclusions and aspects mentioned by EESC.

PERC women committee totally supports the conclusions and recommendations and is trying to see what trade union strategies can be developed to tackle the new forms of work:

## 1.While teleworking is a well-known form of work, its uptake was boosted substantially by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in more than 1/3 of employed people working from home, with a greater share of women than men. As women usually take on most of the caring and household work, teleworking was seen by them as the only possibility to combine this unpaid work and paid employment. We want to call attention to the risk of using teleworking as a possibility of taking up the double burden of paid and unpaid work.

## 2.In the opinion of EESC more women than men have been teleworking during the pandemic. While weekly working hours have been reduced for men more than women over the period, employed women were more likely to have temporarily stopped working . A plausible explanation is that working women and mothers have borne the brunt of increased domestic care responsibilities during COVID-19 due to work, school and childcare centre closures.

Single parents, 85% of whom in the EU are women, were especially vulnerable as the pandemic worsened their already fragile work-life balance.

## 3.Teleworking provides many opportunities to contribute to gender equality such as: improved participation in the labour market; increased flexibility in the organisation of working time and in combining unpaid care responsibilities with paid employment, which can improve labour market participation; productivity gains through higher performance; a better spatial match between demand and supply of labour without the need for moving to another place; time and cost savings due to the elimination of or decrease in commuting, etc. At the same time, teleworking carries some risks, such as possible challenges related to: the worker becoming invisible in the work community; missing out on formal and informal support structures, personal contacts with colleagues and access to information, promotion and training opportunities; possible worsening of gender inequalities and increased risk of violence and harassment. For women, this can exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Mitigating such risks successfully calls for a proper gender analysis – as even policies that might look gender neutral may, in reality, be gender blind and affect women negatively – so every effort must be taken to strive for a positive impact.

## 4.We can mention the existing legal and additional framework relevant to telework. This includes the Working Time Directive, the Occupational Safety and Health Directive, the WLB Directive, and the European social partners' Autonomous Framework Agreements on Telework 2002 and on Digitalisation 2020 . There is no consolidated European framework on telework. There is a need for a proper assessment of the existing rules to determine their effectiveness in the light of the rapid expansion of telework, awareness of new risks, and the lessons learnt. In particular, it  social partners have to work  to review the 2002 Framework Agreement on Telework and give it new impetus.

## 5.Social partners can play a significant role in advancing teleworking in a way that contributes to gender equality, promoting well-being at work and productivity, e.g., through collective bargaining. Considering the wide variety of workplaces, the best results can be achieved with tailored measures at enterprise and workplace level. While it is up to employers to decide on the organisation of work, social dialogue is a vital means in workplaces for dealing with issues such as wages, working-time, modalities of connectivity, health and safety, and training and skills development in the context of teleworking.

## 6.The basic prerequisites of gender-neutral teleworking include the accessibility of the necessary technologies, facilities and skills. There is a need for investing in digital infrastructure and connections for all, including local shared spaces that facilitate teleworking outside the home, as well as enhancing digital skills, with special attention to women, in order to enable them to fully participate in labour markets and address any form of digital divide.

## 7.The availability, accessibility and affordability of care infrastructure and services for children, people with special needs and seniors are another crucial prerequisite of gender-equal teleworking and working in general. We support the calls for a "Care Deal for Europe", ensuring the provision of greater quality services for all throughout the life-cycle

## 8.Teleworking carries the risk of the worker becoming invisible in the work community, missing out on formal and informal support structures, personal contacts with colleagues and access to information. This can result in them being overlooked for promotion and training opportunities and lacking important information relating to pay and existing workers' rights. For women, this can risk exacerbating existing gender inequalities such as the gender pay gap. The proposed Directive on pay transparency, published by the European Commission on 4 March 2021, could be one important means of addressing the lack of information that is caused by invisibility.

## 9.There is need for research into the gender implications and prerequisites of teleworking under conditions not dominated by the pandemic and taking into account long-term developments in different sectors of the economy and society, as well as collecting and disseminating existing good practices across the EU. This would allow for a gender-sensitive approach in achieving the necessary technological and social innovation to ensure that teleworking contributes to promoting gender equality.

## 10.PERC women committee is insisting in increased effort to combat any form of violence against women – including at work, at home and on-line; and is lobbying for ratification of ILO Convention 190 and ratification of Istanbul Convention.

PERC women committee is also raising awareness as concerns the situation of vulnerable groups- migrants, informal economy workers, domestic workers, etc who cannot have access to digitalization and risk to be left behind! In this sense PERC women committee is supporting the initiative of PERC to organize a conference on vulnerable groups and trade union policies to support them.