



## **Employment**

It was agreed that instead of surveying employers which had been part of the original research brief, this section should instead focus on researching current policy and model of practise in the area of family friendly work practises. The following then presents the stated policies of National Women's Council, IBEC, ICTU, Programme for Prosperity and Fairness, as well as some case studies outlining models of best practise.

### **National Women's Council**<sup>9</sup>

“We believe that the term family-friendly should be interpreted in the broadest possible way to incorporate the creation of a healthy work-life balance. In the current economic boom one of the greatest dangers is an increasing tendency for workers to *live to work* rather than *work to live*.”<sup>10</sup>

The NWCI welcomes very much Family-Friendly Workplace Day, particularly for women, who according to the recent Ark Life, AIB's Life and Pensions national survey, continue to do most of the housework regardless of their employment status. That survey revealed that women working full-time in the home spend an average of 81 hours per week on childcare and domestic duties and women who work outside of the home still spend an average of 62 hours on household tasks. ‘Family-Friendly Workplace Day is targeted at employers and employees’ ...The reorganisation of responsibilities around family and home duties is fundamental to the creation of a genuinely family-friendly society’.

### **IBEC Statement**

The development of appropriate measures to assist in reconciling work and family life are important to underpinning economic, social and equality objectives. The emergence of a tightening labour market and the increased emphasis on human resources as a key competitive element serve to underpin the importance of developing innovative ways of maximising the available labour supply. IBEC believes that family-friendly policies, if designed and managed correctly, can serve a dual purpose of contribution to the needs of the business as well as meeting the needs of employees with family responsibilities.

The key challenge in developing family-friendly policies relevant to the level of the enterprise is to find ways of developing approaches that reflect the reality of the workplace. Identifying different options that have the potential to meet the many diverse needs of different employers and their employees is particularly important. In order to be successful, family-friendly measures should contribute to the twin objectives of supporting the effective and efficient operation of the firm and should enhance the opportunity to reconcile work and family life. IBEC believes that if such

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<sup>9</sup> National Women's Council press release taken from NWC website

<sup>10</sup> quote from Chairperson Ms Healy

objectives are delivered, and are seen to be delivered, there will be more widespread implementation of such measures.

### **ICTU Statement**

The Irish Congress of Trade unions fully supports the aims and objectives of the Framework Agreement on Family Friendly Policies in the Workplace. Congress will work with IBEC and the Public Service Employers to support unions, Employers and Employees to balance work and family life in their own workplaces.

The world of work is a changing place with a variety of new and different pressures, not least of which is the need to balance work and family life. The growing numbers of women in the workforce means that more women and men are now striving to meet their job requirements while also caring for their children, elderly parents and other members of the family.

Work is an essential factor of human life from the perspective of quality of life and social integration. Work places that respect and recognise the diverse needs of workers, including their family responsibilities, will gain from the diversity of talents and skills that they will attract and retain within their workforce.

While all of the data shows that it is women that carry out the vast majority of caring duties, men too want to have time with their families and family friendly workplace arrangements can and do address the needs of both men and women. The workplace cannot solve all of these matters, however Congress believes that workplace arrangements that help to balance work and family life can contribute enormously to easing the pressures on working parents and other employees.

Balancing work and family life is a worthwhile goal of value for society, for the economy, for employers and for employees. There is no single solution and the advantage of the Framework Agreement's approach is that it recognises the dynamic and difference that exists in each workplace due to the make up of the workforce; the nature of the business and the requirements of the customer.

The Framework Agreement encourages management, unions and employees to come together to find out what the needs of the employees and the company are and then to identify how they can, in their particular enterprise, meet these needs to the mutual benefit of both company and employee. What is appropriate for one organisation may not work in another. The aim here is not to prescribe or even recommend one form of family friendly workplace arrangement over another.

Rather we are recommending that employers, unions and employees come together to see which family friendly work arrangements work for them.

# **Programme For Prosperity and Fairness**

## **Framework 1 Annex IV**

### **National Framework for the Development of Family-Friendly Policies at the Level of the Enterprise**

#### **1. Introduction**

The objective of this Agreement is to support and facilitate the development of family-friendly policies at the level of the enterprise. The achievement of this objective will be supported by the **National Framework for Family Friendly Policies** to be established within the context of this Agreement. The National Framework will focus on supporting and facilitating family-friendly policies through the development of a package of practical measures that can be applied at the level of the enterprise.

#### **2. Context**

The development of appropriate measures to assist in reconciling work and family life is important to underpinning economic, social and equality objectives. At a policy level the 1999 EU Employment Guidelines have detailed the importance of designing, implementing and promoting family-friendly policies. Similarly, the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) has indicated a need for striking a balance between work and family responsibilities. As articulated in Section 4.3, the development of an accessible, affordable, quality childcare infrastructure is critical to supporting the reconciliation of work and family life. This Agreement considers, however, that there are a range of other measures that can contribute to the reconciliation of work and family life.

The emergence of a tightening labour market and the increased emphasis on human resources as a key competitive element serve to underpin the importance of developing innovative ways of maximising the available labour supply. Similarly, the importance of facilitating equality of opportunity for men and women in the workplace also underscores the desirability of developing policies that can assist parents in reconciling work and family life. Family-Friendly policies can serve a dual purpose of contributing to the needs of the business as well as meeting the needs of employees with family responsibilities.

The challenge in developing family-friendly policies relevant to the level of the enterprise is to find ways of developing identifying different options that have the potential to meet the many diverse needs of different employers and employees is especially problematic. In order to be effective, such options must meet the following objectives:

- a. enhance the opportunity to reconcile work and family life.**
- b. and contribute to the effective and efficient operation of the enterprise.**

### **3. Family-Friendly Policies**

Appropriately designed Family-Friendly Policies can bring benefits to both employees and employers. For employers,

- **the retention of skilled and experienced staff**
- **reduced absenteeism**
- **improved productivity**
- **a more highly motivated workforce and**
- **an enhanced corporate image**

From the perspective of the employee the benefits can include:

- **an opportunity to better balance their working and family lives**
- **greater equality of opportunity between men and women and**
- **a fairer sharing of family responsibilities between men and women**

This National Framework does not attempt to impose any singly measure or model of non statutory family-friendly policy or practice. Both ICTU and employers (IBEC and Public Sector Employers) are committed to the development of family-friendly workplaces and will encourage and support the development of such workplaces in every practical way. There are many examples of family-friendly work practices and policies to choose from, depending on the needs of both employees and employers. The following are examples of family friendly practices that are appropriate for discussion at enterprise level by agreement between employers and unions:

- Job-sharing
- Work sharing
- Part time work
- Flexitime
- Flexi-place/Teleworking
- Term-time working

Within the provisions of existing legislation, the following issues are also appropriate for discussion at local level:

1. Maternity leave
2. Adoptive leave
3. Parental leave
4. Force Majeure leave

### **4. National Framework for Family-Friendly Policies**

The government and the Social Partners agree that a National Framework for Family-Friendly Policies should be established to support family-friendly policies at the level of the enterprise. The purpose of this National Framework will be to identify actions to be undertaken by the Social Partners at national level, which support the development of family-friendly policies in the workplace. The focus of this activity will be to support and guide the voluntary development and implementation of

family-friendly policies at the level of the enterprise in accordance with the objectives detailed in paragraph 2 above.

## **5. Key Activities**

IBEC, Public Sector employers and ICTU agree to undertake the following actions within the National Framework:

- Promote the implementation of family-friendly policies in accordance with the objectives detailed in paragraph 2 above.
- Identify relevant options for enterprise-level family-friendly policies and practices.
- Assess the impact of such policies and practises with regard to the objectives outlined in 2.
- Review the outcome of the ME Family-Friendly Project undertaken by the Department of justice, Equality and Law Reform and propose relevant action to develop family-friendly practices.
- Develop practical guidelines at national level to assist in the implementation of family-friendly policies and practices at enterprise level.
- Develop a Code of Practice, within the context of the existing legislative framework, on the manner in which statutory Parental and Force Majeure Leave can be taken.
- Identify any potential barriers and impediments to the provision of family-friendly policies that meet the needs of working parents and identify possible solutions to such difficulties. In this connection, management, unions and employees could, jointly and on a co-operative basis at enterprise level, examine ways of overcoming any such barriers that may exist: consultations with local childcare groups/providers.
- Disseminate information on appropriate and relevant national and international experience with regard to the operation of family-friendly policies in the workplace.
- Identify best practice and disseminate it to employers and trade unions.
- Monitors and report on developments in respect to family-friendly policies, and
- Provide training to management, union, employer and workplace representatives on the identified relevant family-friendly options and on best practice methods of implementation.

## **6. Support Structures for Implementation**

A National Framework Committee will be established charged with the task of implementing this agreement. The committee will be comprised of representatives of IBEC, Public Sector employers and ICTU. The Committee will be supported by a secretariat provided by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and additional support, where appropriate, will be provided by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. The activities of the National Framework for Family-Friendly Policies above will be supported by a specific budget to be provided within the Human Resources Development Operational Programme.

## **7. Monitoring and Review Mechanisms**

The National Framework committee will monitor and review progress on an annual basis.

[www.familyfriendly.ie](http://www.familyfriendly.ie)

While the research is the concern of Family Friendly work arrangements and work life balance is increasing rapidly, both in range and volume, there is scope for a much more comprehensive treatment of the issue, particularly in the Irish Context.

There is a limited amount of published material, which provides employer organisations with information and advice on the practical aspects of implementing and managing Family Friendly and work life balance arrangements in their enterprises. The need now is for research in to and dissemination of guidelines on how employers can identify the feasibility of such arrangements, how they can select the most effective initiatives to implement and how they can introduce the best methods of monitoring and evaluating the operation of the arrangements.

### **Case Study**

While the limited research available indicates that, in general employers have found that Family Friendly work arrangements produce business benefits there is comparatively little research into the specific gains obtained. Recent research in UK has provided some case studies supporting the case for the arrangements but there is a lack of similar material in Ireland.

Employers, employees and trade unions that are unconvinced about the benefits of Family Friendly work arrangements should be provided with examples of the specific benefits, including these business benefits. In addition there is a case for providing information on the reservations, downsides and resistance, factors to Family Friendly work arrangements to enable employers to weigh the pros and cons of the issue in a more considered manner.

There is also scope for research into the needs of specific employee groups such as lone parents.