

REGAL: researching Work-Life-Balance for vulnerable groups



‘What women say’



This project is co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union



1. Introduction:	
the context of the Belgian case study	3
1.1. Project definition	3
1.2. The socio-economic position of women in Flanders	3
1.3. Women and WLB measures	4
1.4. What women in the REGAL project say about their work-life balance	5
1.5. The gaps between the real and the legislative world	6
1.6. What stakeholders say about the work-life balance of precarious women	6
1.7. Conclusion	6
2. Methodology- storytelling: respecting women	8
2.1. The Belgium target group: adapting the methodology	8
2.2. Building trust: overcoming mistrust	9
2.3. Capacity building: investing in appreciation	9
2.4. The inquiry: aspiring a WLB	10
2.5. Outcome	12
3. What women tell- 4 aspirational stories	13
I have much more to give	13
I wanted to break free	14
Another job would be good for my health, but financially more difficult.	
Then you enter in poverty.	16
A stable life	18
4. What women tell: the aspirations of the women	20
4.1. Overall aspirations	20
4.2. Aspirations on work-life balance	22
4.3. Conclusion	24

This report constitutes as deliverable for Work Package 3 of the REGAL project.

December 2020

© 2020 – REGAL, Regaining life for precarious women at work– project number 831596

p.a. REGAL

Illustration by whaledust.com, originally published in *TEN: Territory, Encounter & Negotiation*

by Fiona Whelan, 2014. © Fiona Whelan & whaledust.com

Beweging vzw

Haachtsesteenweg 579

1030 Brussels

For more information michel.debruyne@beweging.net

Please do not quote without permission.

This publication is also available via <http://www.re-inve>

This publication is part of the REGAL project, this project has received funding from the European Union's REC-RGEN-WWLB-AG-2018 program under Grant Agreement No 831596.

The information and views set out in this paper are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Introduction: the context of the Belgian case study

1.1. Project definition

The REGAL project explores the possibilities of achieving a better work-life balance for vulnerable groups. Work-Life-Balance (WLB) measures aim to realize a high level of employability among both women and men through a good balance between the needs of the family and the demands of work. WLB focuses on the time constraints that families (and more specifically women) experience in order to reconcile work and life. Existing measures to achieve a better balance, however, start from a 'normal' life situation: families not in a precarious situation and with regular jobs.

The REGAL project focuses on a specific target group presented under the current WLB measures, in particular vulnerable women who are in a precarious situation. The vulnerable situation is an additional threshold to find suitable work, to carry it out and to achieve a balanced Work-Life-Balance. A precarious situation is determined, among other things, by less good working conditions (irregular work, little or no flexibility), by little career advancement opportunities, by a poor housing situation, by a poor financial situation. All these elements can be an obstacle in finding a good WLB.

REGAL is investigating how measures can be taken within the WLB to guarantee a better balance for these vulnerable families and to give them an incentive to (continue to) work.

In Flanders, we take the undervalued group of maintenance personnel as a target group demonstrating different precarious risks. The vulnerability in this group is mainly caused by their low level of schooling and, as a result, few opportunities on the labour market. Short-skill can also be caused by the non-recognition of diplomas acquired abroad. Language requirements also result in a very high threshold, which in turn limits opportunities on the labour market. As a result, their vulnerability is particularly high, their chances on the labour market low. Low opportunities translate into precarious working conditions, which makes the WLB particularly difficult for these individuals.

1.2 The socio-economic position of women in Flanders

Belgium's culture is like other European countries based on the male breadwinner model. Women work less and care more. 2 out of 5 women work part-time. Part-time work is slowly changing: Saturday and Sunday work are on the rise: 1 in 5 women work on Saturdays, 1 in 7 on Sundays. Part-time work can be an answer to the demand for a good WLB within a family. For families, however, weekend work can be a hindrance to a good WLB.

The unemployment rate for women is much higher than for men. And especially short-skilled women are more likely to get into unemployment. Although there are also jobs for the short-skilled, these are tough or unattractive jobs or jobs that require little knowledge. Cleaning is such a job: anyone can clean without training. The working hours are to blame for this: early or late hours, for example, are the rule.

Such jobs are also low-paid jobs. The higher poverty rates among women are linked to higher unemployment rates on the one hand and these low-paid jobs on the other.

The current situation can be summarised as follows: reconciling work and family life often involves either adapting the professional role to the situation in the family or adapting the family role to the requirements of the profession. The more financial opportunities women have, e.g. by being highly educated, the easier it is for them to adapt their professional role. Short-skilled women have far fewer opportunities to do so.

1.3. Women and WLB measures

Flanders and Belgium have installed many measures to help families with a good WLB. In this way, Flanders and Belgium are complying with the European directive on a better “work-life balance”.

There are a lot of possibilities to reduce the number of working hours for reasons of care. Public and private sector workers have the possibility to temporarily interrupt their careers or reduce their working hours. These measures are mainly taken up by women if they are under 50. In addition to this time credit system, there are some special leave arrangements. Employees can use parental leave to temporarily interrupt their careers or reduce their working hours. This is possible for every child until it reaches the age of 12. Employees with a care responsibility for a seriously ill family member up to the 2nd degree are entitled to leave for medical assistance. If your family member turns out to be incurably ill and is in a terminal phase, you are eligible for palliative leave. Also here women use more than men these measures (4/5 of the users are women, especially when they are young).

Maternity leave for employees amounts to fifteen weeks, which are theoretically divided into six weeks of prenatal rest and nine weeks of post-natal rest. A similar picture: almost 2/3 of the users are women. The same for the measure, leave for medical assistance: 4/5 is taken up by women.

Flanders has invested heavily in the care of babies and toddlers, including after-school care. In addition to time credit, this type of care offers the possibility of having a good WLB. It is important that the child care is also open to weaker groups. Initially, this care goes to children of working parents, but families with a very low income who are unemployed can also make use of this care to find work. There are also forms of inclusive care for children with disabilities. These facilities are just area-covering. In addition to young children's care, there is also after-school care up to the age of 12. There is a non-income-related childcare next to a limited number of places that are income-related. After-school care is very important for working families. This offers them the opportunity to take on a full-fledged job.

In Flanders and Belgium, there are many measures to ensure that families can realise their WLB. This enables women (or men) to better combine work and family life. Especially the women are using these measures to care for children or to take care for family. The “caring for” fits with the male bread winner model, confirming this model and putting obstacles for women in their working life (i.e. the so called glass ceiling, the lower remuneration, the lower years of working, the lower pension, ...)

The question is whether these measures answer now the concerns and expectations of the women interviewed in this project. Are they taking up these measures, or are these WLB measures useful for them? And are these measures incentives for the women?

1.4. *What women in the REGAL project say about their work-life balance*

The 12 women in the REGAL project work as a cleaning lady or maintenance lady in a large office building, in the kitchen of the company restaurant or as a family carer. 11 women in our focus group work for the same company. 4 of the women interviewed are of foreign origin, 6 are Dutch-speaking, 6 are French-speaking. All the women are married or live together. 3 women have no children. The age category of the interviewed women varied from 21 to 52 years.

The interviews provide a picture of how women and their families try to build a 'good life'. The search for a WLB within their 'good life' is an ongoing task.

All women have a lower education. As a result, almost all the women interviewed had few opportunities. On top of that, for some of them there was a family history that also limited their possibilities. Sometimes, however, a low level of education does not limit people: three stories show that women here show ambition and want to go further. But they also come up against various obstacles. For many of the women interviewed, cleaning or maintenance is the only way to earn an income. Their income is really needed. A number of women also provide the main income.

Good working conditions, even if it is not a dream job, create a sense of well-being. Their choice for this job is strongly influenced by these circumstances: the wages are good compared to other cleaning companies; the hours ensure that they still have time in the afternoon; ...

Working conditions are therefore vital and offer these women and families the chance to live 'well'. Living 'well' is for them, being able to put something aside some money at the end of the month. Less good working conditions (lower wages in other sectors or companies) imply that some women are not looking for another job. In other words, equal and good working conditions are essential to give women (and men) the opportunity to change, to find a job that suits them better.

Caring for the children is a tangle and an ongoing search for a suitable way. Because of the working conditions, finding care is almost impossible: night care or very early care is not (always) available. All have thus to appeal to mothers, fathers, even neighbours. They look also for solutions outside the 'normal' situations: the man searches for another job, a woman works at night, children are left alone at home, ... If you have a handicapped child, it is twice as hard. Adapted care is not always available. Those who could not find a solution had to stop working, with all its financial consequences.

The stories show that the combination of income and care is for them tricky. Going to work to pay for family care is not a meaningful barter for them. Because of the financial consequences they do not use the parental leave measures. They need the income. Childcare and parental leave are necessary measures for a WLB. But only one woman makes use of these measures. Others do not have the possibility, either the childcare is not accessible or non-existent at the necessary hours, or it is too expensive. The family is therefore essential for all these women. Without this network, they cannot go to work, they have no extra income, they cannot take care of.

Education, language, social/political context, family history (moving to Belgium, the need to provide an income), working conditions, ... these are the important factors that determine their possibilities for a 'good life'.

1.5. The gaps between the real and the legislative world

The interviews showed the importance of the terms and conditions of employment and their context of living.

The positive aspects of the job (hours, wages, colleagues) are partly nullified by, among other things, the working conditions, less good public transport, living far away, ... The physical heaviness of the job is also an obstacle to a "good life".

WLB therefore has a different meaning for these women. With a higher family income, they might have stayed at home for the children. For them, working less and working on other conditions are the meaning of the 'good life' and the meaning of a good WLB.

The interviews give us thus a different picture of what a good WLB is. It is not an average picture of WLB. For people in similar situations, people on low incomes and outside normal hours (sooner or later, weekend work), other measures are needed.

For a good WLB, their possibilities need to be broadened: good employment conditions, higher wages, training possibilities adapted to the working conditions, care service that is affordable, the ability to invest in networks, language conditions, good public transport, ... All these elements contribute to a good WLB.

The existing WLB measures are not really the answer for these women. Encouraging people to stay working through the mainstream WLB measures are not the solutions for these women. In this sense there is a real gap between the real and the legislative world.

1.6. What stakeholders say about the work-life balance of precarious women

As the first results of the project showed the importance of good working conditions we organized a meeting with the trade unions. In an follow up meeting with other stakeholders like the family organizations we will present the final conclusions.

This first meeting confirmed the importance of good working conditions for a good WLB. Better hour regulations, better work conditions (lessening the heaviness of the job), better transport regulations, ... these are necessary conditions.

At the same time the trade unions confirmed that they have only suggestions for mainstream jobs. Irregular jobs and low income jobs are not always compatible with the WLB measures. The irregularity of the working conditions demands irregular hours for caring services, making it more complex and more costly. Credit time measures are not an answer for people with low income. Upscaling credit time measures (higher remuneration f.e.) is not feasible.

The trade unions admit that working on better working conditions is the best answer to create a good WLB for these women (and men).

1.7. Conclusion

The male breadwinner model is still mainstream in Belgium. More women are working part time, more women are unemployed and more women are taken up the WLB measures. These measures are also mainstream: they fit the concerns of regular jobs.

Low skilled people and especially women have more heavy or irregular jobs than other, they are overrepresented in the blue-collar jobs. For them, cleaning is an easy entrance into the labour market.

These jobs are heavy and have irregular hours and are low paid.

The women praised the work conditions for the free afternoon and for the relative high wage. But, all have to be economical, the family income is always just enough. The WLB measures are thus not used because of the loss of income. Care services for the children are not found because of the irregular hours. The quest for childcare is difficult: only family or neighbours could give an answer. The childcare doesn't fit their concerns.

The last phase of the project investigates in the aspirations of the women. By reversing the obstacles, making them as an opportunity, we discussed their vision on WLB.

The women didn't asked immediately for other WLB measures. Like the trade unions confirmed, they need better working conditions, cheaper child care services, better public transport, better rewarding of competences, ... WLB means for them, higher income and more care by themselves for their children and their family.

2. Methodology- storytelling: respecting women

REGAL adopts the methodology to work with vulnerable groups developed during the RE-InVEST project. This methodology is based on the Capability Approach, Human Rights Approach and critical social work methodologies, the so-called PAHRCA methodology. In this approach we follow four steps from creating trust to capacity building, inquiry and outcome. These four steps guide us to develop an adapted methodology in each country.



2.1. The Belgium target group: adapting the methodology

A methodology always has to be adapted to the target group. Each target group has its own characteristics and own needs and requirements.

The methodology of REGAL follows from working with a group of women in more or less the same situation. Starting with interviews, we wanted to create a common vision on the problems these women encounter. Through group sessions we sought to create different possible futures for the women. This concept of group methodology was unsuitable for the Belgium case. The characteristics of the women obliged us to adapt our methodology. The adapted methodology asked much more but at the same time featured shorter sessions than the initial group methodology, and it became much more work intensive. Simultaneously at a later stage, we created an environment to work in smaller groups.

All the women except one are employed in the same company as service personnel. These women see each other daily, from 6 am till noon, or often later. They work together in small groups; each group has a responsibility for one of the floors of the building or in the kitchen. The women report that the atmosphere amongst colleagues is good. However, at the same time they are not they do not consider themselves as friends, in the way friends might go shopping together, or to a pub in the evening. The atmosphere among them is fine, but nothing more.

One woman works in another company in another town. She has no connections with the other women. Similar to the other women working in the same company, this woman reports that there is an absence of friendship among colleagues. In this instance, their working relation is even more distant; they only meet each other once every two weeks.

It was impossible to find a suitable time that all the women could come together in a group session. The conditions of their employment and its time schedule are strict meaning that a group session with all women was not possible to begin the project.

In light of this situation we started the project with individual sessions where we explained the project and its expectations.

The individual sessions with the women varied in length. From these first conversations we immediately experienced some barriers and a reluctance to talk. They didn't feel comfortable to talk. Building trust was a first challenge.

2.2. *Building trust: overcoming mistrust*

There was clearly a need to build trust between the individual women and the project leaders. In the beginning of the talks the eleven women saw the project as a duty, an obligation. They didn't feel free to collaborate. This sense of obligation was a hindrance for a free conversation, a conversation without taboos.

This was less a problem for the woman separate from the group. We could easily talk to her in neutral room (a hotel lobby). Because of her work situation, she felt more comfortable. Also, communicating key aspects of the research such as anonymity and safeguarding from harm made her more at ease.

Following our early experiences, we thus started a round of conversations with the women to build trust and confidence.

At first, we explained the project, the methodology and the questionnaire. Their first questions were about privacy. They wanted real safeguards guaranteeing their privacy. As mentioned, the women are fine colleagues but not friends. They didn't want to share their stories, especially the more sensitive parts, with the other women. They considered their life stories and their own stories of the workplace as private; they didn't want to share everything. The stories about their work and the workplace were very delicate: they asked for more than privacy and anonymity, they didn't feel comfortable if their boss knew their stories.

The conclusion of these conversations was that their broad stories would be only used privately and never used in a group session or in a conversation with the management of the company. We agreed that the condensed story -the rewritten story -could be used in group sessions. The condensed story omits the most sensitive parts of their lives.

We discussed with them also the questionnaire to refine the questions, to rewrite the questions and even to omit some questions. Questions about their families were particularly sensitive.

We, the project leaders, answered the questionnaire ourselves to demonstrate to the women what we wanted to investigate. We showed that even with all the safeguards they are not obliged to answer all the questions or that they are not obliged to delve deep into a question. The goal of all the conversations; making the women feel comfortable, was successful and we could continue in an atmosphere of mutual trust.

2.3. *Capacity building: investing in appreciation*

The interviews can be seen as an investment in the appreciation of the women. The interviews were conversational in nature. The questionnaire was followed, but more important was the interviewee's life story. How the interviewee developed their story was much more important than the succession of the questions.

The interviewee took the lead of the conversation. In this conversation the project leaders were the listeners who had the task to create a story of which the women could be proud of. The story is theirs, it is about their achievements, their concerns, and their successes

During this conversation we witnessed the growing self-appreciation of their own life story. We gave them attention, we were interested in their story, and our appreciation of their lives stimulated their self-appreciation.

The conversations were also an investment in storytelling. By using the conversational method, (reframing our questions, asking again the same questions, delving deeper in some answers) we asked them about the key elements of their story, learning to distinguish between the main and side issues of their story, and searching a (thin) red line in their story. This red line was built around the focus of the project, their WLB.

The project leaders stimulated the interviewees to build a story of their life.

These conversations were also an investment in speaking in a small group about their life, their concerns and their achievements, their worries about the job (at that stage, a lot of cleaning ladies and kitchen staff were on temporary unemployment due to covid-19). Voicing their worries and achievements helped them to open a dialogue with their superiors.

During the conversations the project leaders provided some explanations about their rights on WLB. Most of the women were more or less aware of the existing measures of WLB. They were well aware of the several kind of services for childcare or family care and of the measures to reduce temporarily the working hours. They didn't make use of most of these measures. But they showed their proudness, their awareness of these measures, about their experiences of some of the measures (mostly used by persons in their network) but also their willingness to learn. One statement was heard several times during the conversations: "it is not because I have not a high degree, , I don't know these rights" This growing self-awareness was a significant result of the project.

The conversations were used in the first report about the factual situation of the WLB of vulnerable women. The interviews were also transcribed and rewritten into short stories. These short stories were accepted by the interviewees after amendments were made. This acceptance was a necessary step in the process for the women and the project leaders.

2.4. The inquiry: aspiring a WLB

The inquiry round builds upon the enhanced self-awareness of these women. This round in essence requires a group methodology. As mentioned before, in the first months we identified the importance of creating an atmosphere of confidence and trust. Because of the limitations of the focus group work (we didn't receive permission from the management to have all women on the same moment) we went for small groups: These groups were the Dutch speaking, the French speaking, and the women with a migrant background.

The Covid-19 pandemic interfered with our goal to work in small groups. In the first months of the pandemic, even small groups were not allowed. So we had to start again individually, freewheeling with the women about their aspirations. The freewheeling is based on reversing the problems women has suffered. Freewheeling is not so easy done. Appandurai helps us to clarify the hindrances.

The inquiry is much more than a search for other measures for a real WLB. It is about aspirations of these women for their life. We used here the ideas of Arjun Appandurai. For Appandurai aspirations form parts of wider ethical and metaphysical ideas which derive from larger cultural norms. Aspirations are thus never simply individual (as the language of wants and choices inclines us to think). They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life. Aspirations to the good life are part of some sort of system of ideas which locates them in a larger map of local ideas and beliefs about life and death, the

nature of worldly possessions, the significance of material assets over social relations, the relative illusion of social permanence for a society, the value of peace or warfare.

At the same time, aspirations to the good life tend to quickly dissolve into more densely local ideas about marriage, work, leisure, convenience, respectability, friendship, health, and virtue. More narrow still, these intermediate norms often stay beneath the surface and emerge only as specific wants and choices: for this piece of land or that, for that marriage connection or another one, for this job in the bureaucracy as opposed to that job overseas, for this pair of shoes over that pair of trousers. But here is the twist with the capacity to aspire. It is not evenly distributed in any society. It is a sort of meta-capacity, and the relatively rich and powerful invariably have a more fully developed capacity to aspire.

What does this mean? It means that the better off you are (in terms of power, dignity, and material resources), the more likely you are to be conscious of the links between the more and less immediate objects of aspiration. Because the better off, by definition, have a more complex experience of the relation between a wide range of ends and means, because they have a bigger stock of available experiences of the relationship of aspirations and outcomes, because they are in a better position to explore and harvest diverse experiences of exploration and trial, because of their many opportunities to link material goods and immediate opportunities to more general and generic possibilities and options. They are more able to produce justifications, narratives, metaphors, and pathways through which bundles of goods and services are actually tied to wider social scenes and contexts, and to still more abstract norms and beliefs. This resource, unequally tilted in favor of the wealthier people in any society, is also subject to the truism that “the rich get richer”, since the archive of concrete experiments with the good life gives nuance and texture to more general norms and axioms; conversely, experience with articulating these norms and axioms makes the more privileged members of any society more supple in navigating the complex steps between these norms and specific wants and wishes. And vice versa.

Appandurai shows that vulnerability limits the possible range of aspirations just because the limited experiences people have. In the first report we accentuated the modest wishes and wants of the interviewees. This modesty can hinder a true search for WLB for vulnerable women.

Our methodology takes into account these limitations of modesty.

We had already asked during the interviews to prioritize their concerns about WLB. Which issues are for them more important than others and why? We brought these different priorities together on large sheets of paper and presented it to them in a new round of conversation.

We stimulated their creativity by reversing the problems. Reversing the problems, looking at concerns from a different angle demands a kind of freedom from worries. Interviewees have to step beyond their own situation.

We confronted the participants with different but still realistic (for them) situations of WLB: same remuneration versus higher remuneration, full time versus part time, early hours versus 9am to 5pm hours, making use of social services of own network (family, friends, neighbours, ...), conditions for quality of work. These several images, situations challenged them to step beyond but at the same time to reckon with their own situation.

The conditions of a freedom to speak we created from the first sessions on helped the women to step beyond their own situation. For most of the women it was not so easy, sometimes it was only small steps beyond their own situation.

2.3. Outcome

The synthesis of the several stories is the product of their work, it belongs to them, it's their merit. In a final conversation we asked the women how they saw this project. Their evaluation of the project is also an essential step in the growing of self-awareness of the women.

3. What women tell- 4 aspirational stories

I have much more to give

I am the eldest of a family of 5 children. We lost my mother. I got married 28 years ago. We have no children. My dad lives our street. As he is old, he comes to our house quite often.

I also have a very young sister who had her children a little late and who doesn't know how to take care of them very well. After my work, 3 to 4 days a week, her children are at my house. I try to follow them in their homework. So, in fact, we are about 10 people in the house most of the time. My brother, my sister's children that I look after, my sister herself, my dad come to eat in the evening. I make sure they all eat well.

My sister and her husband have a Turkish pizzeria. I haven't had the chance to have children my own. I welcome my sisters' children to manage their studies, and that they can eat a little more varied and healthy. I take a lot on myself in the family, I have to. When I see how my sister cooks, how it's done, how she buys food... I told myself that the children should have a varied diet and a school life. Daddy is always at the pizzeria. It's the same with my brother. Dad lives 3 minutes away from my house, he's 85 years old. I always start cooking as soon as I get home, defining first whether it's for 2 or 4 or 6 people. It's very tiring. You don't feel it when you are 20 years old. But now I feel it. It's becoming to be a bit difficult. I do the cooking, the cleaning up afterwards. I'm tired. I'm 49 years old now.

Even though I'm in the cleaning sector, I have a diploma to be a secretary and was able to enter university. I've have been doing a lot of training while I was working; it's been very hard for me to combine. I did this, hoping that it would change something. But that wasn't my first goal. My first goal was to know how to speak. I had a language problem. My father was a former gendarme in Turkey. He came here in 1965 with the aim of earning a living. He was a very strict person. And women didn't have much to say. It was 'shut up'. When you dared to say something...: I was always stopped. After I got married it was more or less the same thing. It went on and on. And after realizing the injustice behind it, I said to myself one day: "No, it can't go on like that." I decided to come back here as a union delegate in 2012. When I took the floor, I realised that something was wrong. I couldn't speak, it wasn't coming out. I could speak with my colleagues, my sisters, my husband. But not in public. To solve this, two years ago, I went to the Haute Ecole. I told them: "You have to teach me how to speak. I can't speak, I can't speak in public because I've been silenced all my life." "The coordinator listened to me, she registered me. That's how I started studying. I was fine, I was learning and then I said to myself: "We'll see what happens".

At one point I said to myself: "I'm sitting next to this toilet paper, what am I still doing here?" I continued anyway.

In the Brussels group we started the lessons with 22 people. We ended up with 5 people. It was very heavy to combine with my family and professional situation: you have to do research and take the time to write. By that time I had finished working at 11.30am. then I went home and prepared the evening meal with my husband. At 4 pm, it really starts: the children come home from school, daddy comes for dinner. My writing work for school, I organised on Monday, Friday and Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings. On Wednesday afternoons I would also come here to the building to study in isolation. On Friday and Saturday I studied very late at night. And Sunday morning very early because it was quiet. I finished these studies in 2018. One day I got an interview with two persons: the Walloon minister who told me if we were still here and the director of the PCSW in Schaerbeek. "When you have finished you can come to my office. I can't promise you anything. We will try". I have finished now and was successful in my studies. But I didn't get anything.

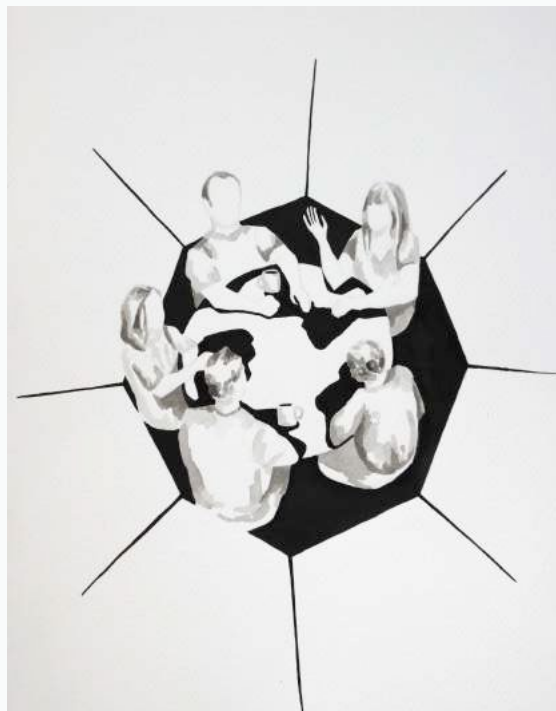
It's been a year now that I've been in charge of cleaning. I am replacing the main chef who is ill. Before I was only doing the ground floor, the toilets. That was it. Now you have to keep an eye on all the girls, check if the floor is well done. Dealing with complaints all the time. At 2pm I go home. It's a huge difference compared to my function before.

Since I became the main responsible at work, my husband helps me a little in the household. He does the lessons, he takes out the rubbish. He vacuums twice a week. Often he already prepares the salad. He never did that before. He was a 'real Turkish man', a real macho. This year he realizes that I'm really struggling.

For 24 years I've also had part-time work, less than half time. Now it's full time. I always wanted to work full-time. I've never had the opportunity, every time I asked, in vain. Last year, when the boss fell ill, they needed a replacement for her. They offered me the job. I accepted. I had a conflict with my husband, he told me that in my place he would never have accepted. "You've been asking for years and he's only giving it you now." All that time before, they told me it's a man's job. I don't think so. The person I am replacing now was a man. There is always a way to realize something.

I try to combine family care with full-time work, but it's tiring. Before my father and the others arrive, I ask myself, "can I take a nap?" If they had given me this full time 10-15 years ago, I'm sure it would have been different. But now, after 25 years of cleaning, I'm already tired. It's not a sitting job. You move all the time. It hurts all over.

This full time job that I always dreamed of doing is a handicap at this stage. And what's more, with the studies I've done: I'm not made for cleaning. That's my conviction. I have a lot more to give than just handing over people toilet paper and checking if the paper's there.



I wanted to break free

I finished secondary school in Portugal. My mother wanted me to go to university. I'm an only child and I didn't want to study any more. I wanted to break free for a while. My aunt had been living here in Belgium for 20 years. She proposed me to come over. So I did; my boyfriend followed me. I was happy to leave the country. That was the start of my experience.

When I arrived in Belgium, I looked for a job. I first worked in the archives of the mutual insurance company. But there wasn't much budget and they couldn't keep me. Then I worked in a clothing retail shop for 6 months. I didn't like this job because of the hours and the fact that I needed to work on Saturdays and Sundays. Besides, walking on high heels all day and in a suit: that's not me.

In 2018, I came here for cleaning. I left after 13 months, as I didn't had a fixed contract at first. But the head chef called me after a while to come back to work in the kitchen. That's where I am now. I'm helping them out because there are a lot of people absent because of covid-19.

I've been living in Belgium with my boyfriend for 7 years now. Since I was 19 years old. When I graduated from general secondary school, I had the idea to become a lawyer and start studies for that. But at the same time I wanted to have some money of my own. And in my home country, job opportunities were scarce. Now I'm a bit sorry. But once you start working, you can't stop. That was my choice at the time. Sometimes you don't think much when you're young.

Now I would like to continue here. Because I like it. The work, the colleagues. As I'm used to working, I don't see myself going back to school. Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't think so. After a long day, doing classes in the evenings and then again starting early here. I can't combine this job with studying in the evenings.

The problem is that I still have a fixed-term contract: either 1 month, 4 months or 6 months. So it's not definite. I think you can do 2 years with a fixed-term contract and then it is binding. But with the corona, it becomes more difficult. There's a lot of uncertainty amongst the personnel.

My boyfriend works as a truck driver in the construction industry. He starts at 7.30am until 4pm. He can go home earlier if necessary, his boss is flexible. I start here at 6.15 am and finish at 2.10 pm. That's a full time. I'm convinced that with this work timing we'll be able to combine it with a baby. Our wedding is planned for next year. I have set my limit of becoming a mother at 30. And maybe having our house here. We rent all the time. But our budget doesn't allow us to buy. Maybe in 10 years. I need a fixed and stable contract at first.

If I'll have a child, I could also call on a Portuguese group in the neighbourhood with whom I go out. We are friends. Sometimes I also look after my girlfriend's child. The child is now 4 years old. I would lose too much money with child care facilities; they're not even open the time I start working.

I come home around 2.30pm, I take something out to make some food, I shape up a bit the house, I watch TV, I make some food, I take a shower and I go to sleep. During the week we don't have much choice. During the week there's no energy for something else or to go out.

My aspirations for the future: that's having a stable contract and to earn enough to have a family. And having our own house.

Another job would be good for my health, but financially more difficult. Then you enter in poverty.

I have been doing the same job for 32 years now: cleaning in a large office building in Brussels. The years are starting to weigh on me, the heavy physical work has already kept me at home for 9 months a few years ago. Today I am fifty years old and I still have 14 years to go. That seems like forever. The doctor said that restarting full-time with this heavy physical work unfeasible. But it soon became a full-time job again anyway: the idea of having to work even longer and the financial consequences weighed too heavily on me. People don't realise that this is a tough job. Caring is a hard job, but cleaning is also a tough job. In fact, politicians should take into account of the fact that cleaning staff also have a hard job. And that they shouldn't be considered to work the same amount of years as 'normal jobs'. I already started working at the age of 18.

The Corona-situation now, ensures that I can do some more varied work. Many maintenance staff have been placed on technical unemployment; fortunately not me.

I am now allowed to make mouth masks, a welcome change of scenery. And this job fits me better: in secondary school I was trained for the clothing sales and shop window dressing. Studies which my mother did not allow me to complete: a girl that studies was out of the question. "you should be contented having a job". That history marked me: I told my children to get a diploma. No matter what they learn, but they have to get their diploma. I did not have that chance. My son is an international truck driver, he still lives at home and has irregular hours. My daughter is still studying: caring. There is no place for real leisure or hobbies in my life: the dinner hour is set in the evening according to when the son has finished his truck day and after that I am even too tired to follow something on television. It are long days: I get up at 4 a.m. to start work at 6 a.m. and finish at 1.45 p.m.; that's a full-time job. I go by car, then I reach the building in 20 minutes. By public transport, I would be on the road for 3 hours. When my daughter was born, I took a career break because the crèches opened too late. Once the children could go to school, my husband went to work later, so he could take the children to school. Now the children are grown up, but still live at home. We still adjust our hours at home according to the children's needs.

The work itself gets tougher and tougher to deal with the older you get. Every day I am exhausted. Providing other work for me is difficult. I cannot stand by, I have to move. There are 2 cleaning people on one floor responsible for 4 blocks. I do all the work on the -1 floor. There are about 20 toilets to clean. I am constantly bending over, also for cleaning the showers. I am glad that corona allows me to do the cloakroom and the sewing at the moment. But with the new regulation now, you have to work longer. Staying at home for 1 week, coming to work for 1 week. It is not well distributed. The more you work, the less you earn. The less you do, the more you get paid. Then there's my sick leave, and the start of my career half-time. That all counts for your pension scheme. At the end of October I will be 50 years old. Normally I still have 14 years to go. And I've already started from the age of 18.

Actually, I'd rather do something else. But I was never offered any extra training. There have been several vacancies, I have applied for all. The last time I was the only candidate and was not selected because they assume I wouldn't be able to do that job as an assistant in charge of maintenance. I have been very disappointed about this. I was allowed to go to Vokans with the permission of the director. There will be another vacancy in September. I asked him if the vacancy was suitable for me. He can't promise anything, I'm not alone. I'll put myself forward as a candidate and if I don't get it, then I'm out of here.

I could also do some PC work, but I have no diploma in my hands. In fact, that is where the problem lies. If I look for another job now: I am 50 years old. Who else is going to want me? Especially if they know my background. You start to doubt yourself.

I have the feeling that the director is starting to realise that he needs to have some consideration for and that's why he has now given me the corona sewing job. Moreover, the contact with VOKANS has gone very well, frankly. At some point you know where want to go, but you have to dare to take the step. They are helping me with that, they guide me. I'm thinking more and more in the direction of family care. I like to have social contact. It's something completely different, a different rhythm of life. My daughter is in the same field of study, she is now in her 7th year. Family care: my husband said that this would really be something for me.

I have been union delegate for a couple of years now. The first time I got elected, you have to follow a course of 4 years. Some people of other firms were there. When you hear them talk, you think 'we're doing well here'. Another job might be physically better, but financially more difficult. Then you are in poverty.

But still: if I don't have that other job here in September, I'm going to apply for family care. Family care would be better for me. I'm tired of cleaning now. But as far as the benefits and the financial story are concerned, it's all very well here, but you don't get any opportunities to move forward.

And at the end of the month our financial situation stays tight: a house has to be paid off, the electricity and water bills to be paid off, food and clothes for four people, And there are the costs of 3 cars necessary for our jobs. Fortunately, our son does hand over part of his wage. We each have our own banc account. But we share the costs.



A stable life

I start my work at 6 in the morning until 2.15 pm. I like working for the coffee service. And I like to start work very early. I pick up the left overs in the meeting rooms from meetings that were held late in the afternoon. Or buffets from the evening activities. At the coffee service, I start at 6 o'clock. The other colleagues start at 7 o'clock. Another one starts at 8 am. I take all the trolleys, in all the rooms and on all the floors and start collecting plates, crumbs, cups,... I sort them out and put them in the dishwasher. Then a colleague comes to vacuum and clean the tables. Sometimes, it's a mess and not easy to do. So I prefer to start early, it's less stressful.

I come from Romania. I am married. I don't have children, but my husband has a child from his first marriage. My husband is older than me: he is 62 and I am 48. This year we will be celebrating our 25th wedding anniversary.

Before Romania joined the EU, we came to Belgium with 4 people. Me, my husband, my sister and my brother-in-law. We applied to the Belgian embassy in Romania. We filled in all the papers to get a visa. My husband has a self-employed status. I had the right to work in the Benelux as an employee. We left our country, because there was no future and a lot of corruption. I worked in a beautician's salon, but every year the clientele was shrinking more and more. The country, the region, our city, had completely fallen into disrepair. That's why we left. We've been living here for 14 years now.

In Romania I finished the industrial high school. Afterwards I completed a training course in aesthetics. So I'm a beautician by profession. When I arrived in Belgium, I opted for an intensive French course. I also had a Dutch and IT training course. This was my own choice: as I'm a Belgian resident, I should have a basic knowledge of both languages here; that was my conviction. French was easier to learn. The courses lasted until 10 pm. I always got up at 4.30 in the morning and went home at 10pm. Studying and working: it was difficult to combine.

My husband started working as a self-employed person, in the demolition sector; a really heavy job. Thanks to a Romanian man we met on the tram in Belgium, he found another job. I sent several CVs myself. I never received a reply. Thanks to someone related to us, I was able to do an interview here. I was accepted. During the day I cleaned and in the evening I went to school.

At first I didn't want this job. I wanted to practice my profession. But I understood that the system here's different, I was still used to the communist system. I asked myself: what is a stable life? When you get a salary every month; that you can count on that.

I informed myself on the criteria for becoming a beautician, but then I would be self-employed and I would have to work on Saturdays as well. So I decided not to refuse this permanent job and to give up my other ambitions.

At a given moment, there were reorganisations in our company. I tried my luck and succeeded: now I work for the coffee service and can therefore do more than just maintenance. I like the coffee service: it's another contact with people. It's also a different position: in cleaning there are people who haven't studied. They can only clean. There are people who are not so intelligent. Everyone has her own character: I try to show all my abilities, that I am capable of managing a job. I think I have also a form of "appearance", and of respect towards people. That has brought me this progress in the work.

But at the same time, I have to see my limits: I am in a country that is not my mother country. I know my limits, linguistically too. The studies I have done are not enough to progress further on the professional ladder. Realizing that, I would like to stay here: I like stability.

I work full-time. We are very careful with our budget. First of all we pay for everything that has to be paid for. What is left, we manage to do with it. If it's possible to put something aside, we do it. We don't often go out to restaurants. We were educated to be careful with money. We don't buy something to show off. We also don't have the opportunity to buy a house with our salary. We rent a small flat. But that allows us to keep our freedom. It also gives us the possibility to leave again.

Around 3.30 pm I go home. I do errands, do the laundry, prepare food. I like to read and listen to music. For my husband and I, it's very important to eat and talk together; we are still very much in love.

Sometimes I take care of elderly neighbours whose husband has died. I do errands for them, I help them with the stairs. I live in a small building where there are a lot of old people. When we need something, we can ask them too. To write a letter, or, when we go on holiday we leave the key with them.

Nowadays, my husband doesn't work. A good year he worked for a construction company, after the period when he was self-employed. But afterwards he couldn't get the job in a recycling station, for destroyed buildings. He tried several times, but the work was reduced. Considering his age too, it counts a lot in order to find a job. He found a temporary job in Liège for a while, he replaced a person who was ill as a mechanic. Now the question of age is there again in the quest for work. But it's OK. We are a family that knows how to manage the salary.



4. What women tell: the aspirations of the women

Very clearly, it was no evident question for the women in our focus group to reflect on aspirations or any expectations they still have in life. As a common theme throughout the aspiration sessions, there was the fixation on one's present life and the lack of having any changes in mind. Throughout life story telling we succeeded to distillate (modest) overall aspirations. Throughout a work-life balance scheme with specific questions, in an another round of sessions, we tried to focus the aspirations on the work-life balance sphere itself. This chapter is thus subdivided in three parts: the overall aspirations of the women, their expectations on work-life balance and the related conclusions.

4.1. Overall aspirations

Women (and men) who can take little care of themselves obviously have fewer opportunities to have expectations. After all, they have little or no room (literally and figuratively) for creating expectations.

Almost all women of our focus group therefore have modest expectations.

M. has few wishes. Her attitude is also "I don't like to change". Just like M., B. has "no need for changes. Everybody knows what to do, everybody knows his planning".

N. also has few wishes: "we have a caravan in X. We go there every weekend. There we cycle and walk." N. does think about her pension: another 8 years to go, but fears the retirement age would go up: otherwise I will have to work until my 67 years!

Z. dreamed of becoming a nurse, she sees herself wearing a white apron and a white cap. "Unfortunately, I didn't go for these studies. I regret it from time to time. When I got married, I stopped with everything. " Being able to go on holiday today is her little dream.

F. had a sports career in mind. She reached the top in Belgium when she was 16 years old. She regularly went abroad and was busy with her sport day in and day out. "I had to stop because of my parents. "I no longer had the time to do it".

H. does not have many wishes either. Looking back, she would have studied longer, but "her cousin influenced her a bit". Her husband works in shifts, they barely see each other some weeks because the hours are not the same. "She and her two daughters say that next week will be a good week" if the shifts fall well. An ordinary life as a family is her wish.

C. wants to "work for a living". She doesn't want to work more hours, otherwise her quality of life will deteriorate. "If you still have to do everything in the weekend, then you don't have a weekend." Weekends are sacred to her.

These women have small, modest expectations of their lives: a normal family life, work for a living; the older women are looking forward to their retirement. When they look back at their past choices, we hear some regrets.

Some women do dream of another job, another life.

V. had always wanted to work in a crèche. She was able to do this for a while, but she didn't like the working method, so she returned to cleaning. Yet she dreams of taking care of other children after her retirement, in the new born hospital department. She also aims to work as a volunteer in an animal shelter. Another thing she aspires is to study Spanish and bakery. Now

she wants to make up for her dreams she had as a youngster.

K. has never had another job, never another life: "I never have lived another life". However, she has the ambition to move on. She has become a trade union representative. She has studied. She wants another job. But she will not get another job, not even a full-time job. But she continues doing the same job because she must fulfil the criteria for her pension. She would prefer to work in accounting. But she doesn't get any opportunities.

S. wants to change her job. But "I am 50 years old now, who is going to want me, and if they know my background. You're starting to doubt yourself."

Yet she wants to try, if she doesn't get a better job in the company, she wants to take the plunge, towards family care. "It's something completely different, a different working rhythm, with a lot of social contact.

R. wanted to work here as a beautician. She has written several letters of application, but never received an answer. The language requirements weigh heavily. "I have to know my limits. I am in a country that is not my mother country. ... in this context, I would very much like to remain working here. I am very much in favour of stability. » She would like to work in a company that organises voluntary work, for example. "But that is the linguistic barrier, ... I do not know how to write the language, that is what I am trying to do. She does dream of returning to her country, if she could find a job there, ... But then comes the question of stability and security: 'but here you have many advantages that we do not have over there'.

C. has turned her hobby into a secondary occupation. She does this in the evenings and at weekends. It is in the alternative atmosphere. It helps her, her son and the people who attend. In time C. wants to make her secondary profession a main occupation. But there are a lot of questions: "now we have to pay off our house for another 4 years. It's small, but for the things we want to do, we want more space. But then I would have to move and change region in family care. In that case, it will mainly be the financial aspects that will have an impact'.

Several women dream of a different job. One thinks of a meaningful pension, the other women interviewed hope to find something else. But here, too, various obstacles are discussed: language, old age, the uncertainty about the (financial) security of the current job, ... A woman wants to take the plunge if she is not offered a better job within the company.

We also asked whether they have taken any steps or still want to take steps to study.

R. took both French and Dutch lessons and computer classes. Each time she came home at 10 p.m. and got up at 4.30 a.m. the next day: "it was difficult to combine". Yet she persevered.

P. doesn't think she is still going to study, after a long day of work it is difficult for her to take lessons.

Z. has taken Dutch lessons, she now has a basis. But "when you have a certain age, and do studies with 2 or 3 children, it's not easy".

V. also took Spanish lessons. It was always in the morning, she couldn't continue anymore because of the working hours.

K. feels misunderstood: "If you see the studies I did, I am not made to do the cleaning. That's my conviction. I have more to say than to overhand toilet paper to people and to check the

work of my colleagues . In Belgium, she has been in part-time education for 4 years. It was particularly difficult because she had to take care of the whole family. She passed with distinction, and she was encouraged to go on to university. "But to continue, to continue where?" Her colleagues tell her to look for another job, with all her possibilities and diplomas. "But when you have a life from 5 o'clock in the morning till 2 pm in here, you are exhausted afterwards. My life is just here at my workplace and at home, that's it."

S. wants to change, she has contacted VOKANS for guidance to another career. "They don't realise that this is a tough job. Being a nurse is a hard job, but cleaning is also a hard job. I have been absent for 9 months, the doctor said that I wouldn't be able to do this job for another 10 years".

Some women have invested in themselves. It was difficult: combining a hard job with studies and home care, ... this requires a lot. Then the questions arise whether it makes sense: to carry on for what, if you don't get opportunities?

Combining such a job with a study is almost impossible. This therefore limits people's opportunities. For a good WLB, however, it is necessary to broaden these possibilities: good employment conditions, training possibilities adapted to the working conditions, reception that is affordable, ...

4.2. Aspirations on work-life balance

We detected in the storytellings of the 12 women 4 main 'work-life balance fields' translated as options in order to discuss the work-life balance aspirations. A first on the option on 'working full-time or half-time' and what advantages that could bring or could have brought in their life. A second option we proposed was the choice between the 'early hour scheme' and the 'office hour scheme'. Thirdly, we discussed the option of the use of public or private services for their household or care tasks. Finally, aspirations on working conditions were revealed by confronting the women with two sub options: the option of working with automatized or modern machines as a first item and the option of having additional training during the working hours. The results of the small group discussions are synthesized in this chapter.

4.2.1. Working full-time or part-time

One third of the interviewed women work full-time, two third work part-time (50 to 80%).

Both 'parties' tend in average to stick to the same regime when we confront them with the option to change. Not that they are fully contented with this regime, but because they are settled in the coping strategies of their regime. The part-time participants enjoy their 'free afternoon', necessary to dealing with caring and home tasks and a way to recover from the early morning work hours. Even if confronted with a higher full-time salary, they don't want to give their spare time after work. The full-time working interviewees have a more complex view: some participants do need each supplementary euro and opt for a maximum working hours in order to have a more 'comfortable' income. When confronted with the additional time they would get with a part-time job, they don't have the ... there's also for some participants the 'prestige' of having been 'awarded' with a full-time job, it's a way of demonstrating that they have succeeded in their profession. Contrary to this, there's the reality of the complaint that they are exhausted by the heaviness of this physical job: the full-timers don't manage to do much more after work or/and during the work week. But when there's the choice to opt for a part-time, they do not tend to change their system.

To conclude, the option they've made or received for a full-time or a part-time is a well reflected choice with its advantages and disadvantages. But they have made it their way of life and don't have much aspirations to change it, despite the physical burden.

4.2.2. Early hours or 'normal' office hours

Almost all participants have extreme early waking-up and working hours within their present working scheme. We proposed them 'normal' office hours for the same salary. Not one participant was eager to change these early hours for a more 'usual' 9 to 5 schedule. These early hours were just their instruments to deal with their fragile work-life balance. The early hours permits them to have finished work at 12 or 2 o'clock in the afternoon and to schedule 'house work' in the afternoon. That time they use to deal with their family life and the daily cares. It allows them to search their children from school in the afternoon and to prepare dinner time in the evening. It's also their 'recuperation time' when they can take a nap or can. The proposal for 'normal' office hours didn't brought up any particular advantage, despite the fact that they could sleep longer. On the contrary, it's their only 'legalised' instrument that allows them for organising their family/home life. This advantage is perceived by the interviewed women as an 'acquired right' that is very important to maintain and safeguard.

4.2.3. Social services or family network

Because of their early working-time schedule, most of the participants were confronted with unavailable care facilities for their children. Next to this problem of unavailability, there were the high costs of these facilities, compared to their income. For several cases, making use of childcare amount to using their integral salary for this. Therefore some of the interviewed women opted for not working during the pre-school period of their children and taking care themselves of the children. Or, most of the participants count on their family or neighbours for childcare.

We asked them if they would do otherwise when they should have the possibility of available care facilities. What was quite striking, is the fact that social services as an instrument are not present in their mindset. It's not something that they tend to reach out for arranging their work-life balance. Question is of this is due to a self-coping strategy or due to the fact that these social services don't reach this target group. Even when proposing the offer of affordable childcare, the participants were not that reluctant to opt for external care facilities. They tend to stick with a confident, well-known own network of family, relatives or neighbours. Even while reflecting on the limitations and tensions this may cause in their family or relatives network.

The option of using external home cleaning facilities or help in the house is not an aspiration for them. As this task is their professional task as well, it's something that they want to do and have control over in their own house as well. To summarize, the positive sides of social services don't tend to reach this target group.

4.2.4. Aspirations on working conditions

This aspiration got the most sensitive and open reactions from our interviewed women. They demonstrated clear aspirations for 'lighten up' the physical heaviness of their job. Their aspirations were quite functional and easy to respond: they ask for lighter machines, a system where cleaning the windows gets more easy to do, a cleaner desk culture where they can more fluently clean the offices,... . It is quite clear that the physical burden makes them suffer and needs to be answered on the micro-level by the employer or standardised in sectoral legislation. Another aspiration is the question for more flexibility in their working conditions. Why to lose more than an hour a day because you are not allowed to stop 5 minutes earlier in order

to catch your train? The transport time from home to work is a factor of importance in seeking for a better work-life balance. Next to a more shaped public transport for 'early hours', a more flexible attitude in workingtime scheme could offer solutions here, proposed by the interviewed women.

4.3. Conclusion

These women have small, modest expectations for their lives: a normal family life, a work to live; the older women are looking forward to their retirement. When they look back at their past choices, we hear some regrets. Different women dream of a different job. But here, too, various obstacles come into play: language, old age, insecurity versus the (financial) security of the current job, Some women have invested in themselves. But it was difficult: combining a hard job with studies and home care, ... this requires a lot from them. Then the question arise as to whether it still makes any sense: continue for what, if you don't get any opportunities?

Their aspirations are low, even if they make an investment. Their 'life experience' doesn't give them many options, another life isn't for them.

Appandurai said that aspirations are never simply individual (as the language of wants and choices inclines us to think). They are always formed in interaction and in the thick of social life. Aspirations to the good life are part of some sort of system of ideas which locates them in a larger map of local ideas and beliefs. The modest aspirations of the women reflects their position in the larger "map of ideas and beliefs". As Appandurai shows people and especially women with low level of schooling have a small place upon this map of ideas and beliefs. Their opportunities to enhance their place on this map is limited, limited as they have less capability-sets than others. With Appandurai we can conclude that limited capability-sets hinder people to view other visions on the "good life".

REGAL enhanced the self-appreciation of the women. From this enhancement women invested in a discussing about the "good life" for women with low skills.

At the heart of their discussions was the feeling that they must invest more than others in realizing a WLB. This means that the measures for WLB are not adapted to their situation and needs; these measures are designed for middle class people or people having a 9 to 5 job.

Secondly, WLB is for them a self-constructed difficult amalgam. Amalgam: they must look, to search themselves for solutions to raise their children, to care for their parents, of to care for themselves. The solutions are meanly found in their own network: husband who must find another job, parents need to care for their grandchildren, neighbours who take the children overnight, ... Investing in a network is not easy: their working hours do not coincide with the daily business as usual hours.

Thirdly, the job can be described in most of the cases as a heavy job. They are tired, they have physical constraints, they are looking forward the moment they can retire. Even the young ones in the group were complaining about the heaviness of the job.

Fourthly, the modesty of their individual aspirations reflects the modesty of their political aspirations on WLB. Overcoming the obstacles for their WLB was a difficult step (a step to far) for some of them. The most heard statement was "that's life".

Fifthly, there were no complaints about their salary and working conditions, especially comparing with relatives working in other cleaning companies. But at the same time, they talked about their financial difficulties, the little earnings of their husbands, the bigger expenses of the kids. Time leave measures with lower allowances were not a financial reality for them.

The result of the discussions demonstrated that nowadays measures on WLB are not functional for these women. Therefore four propositions are put forward:

- Jobs for low skilled women are usually low remunerated. These jobs are also mostly low appreciated, even seen as invisible jobs. The household income is rather low compared to other families. Special payed leave measures are thus not attractive for them: the income losses are too important. Our suggestion is then that payed leave measures are income related with an additional prime for low-income groups. The same applies for specific social care services.
- Jobs for these low skilled women are often accompanied by irregular working hours, very early or very late. Social care services are not always available during the needed hours. Especially in rural or semi-rural, semi-urban areas these services are not available. Can a social investment realize a country wide service? Can existing social care services be extended to early, late hours and night hours? All the interviewed women used today an informal network of care givers. The suggestion raised if the system of care givers can be extended to childcare?
- Jobs for low skilled women are often "heavy" jobs, demanding physically a lot of them. Several answers are possible. Typical for all these jobs is that they have not flexible hours, the job must be done between strict hours. Flexibility is almost a rule for 9 to 5 jobs, but not for these jobs. Can flexibility be extended to these jobs? Do these jobs have to be done during these particular hours? The flexibility of the 9 to 5 jobs can give room for flexibility for other jobs. Is a redefinition of statute of "heaviness" of jobs relevant? Is it possible to diminish the burden of the job? A side aspect of the burden of the job is the living-working traffic: some women are spending a lot of hours waiting for a train or sitting on public transport. Investing in public transport, extending public transport in early, late and traffic hours is necessary for them.
- Almost all the interviewed women have a low skilled educational history: they stopped early, they have a dual learning history, they have a non-certified foreign degree. This life history limits them to create a large capability set. This means also a limitation of a broad and enhanced vision on possible futures for themselves and society. Investing in education is vital for a democratic society where all positions in the labour market are validated. Investing in a broad and enriched lifelong learning is moreover necessary to have an equilibrated vision on the "good life", where everyone can take part in the building of this vision.
- Although their remuneration comparing to other companies is fairly good, they all aimed for a higher household budget. A higher household budget would free them from the difficult search for a real WLB. A higher remuneration for low skilled jobs or low appreciated jobs would uplift them, would give them more room for self-development and a genuinely WLB.

NOTES

- 1 Dr Rory Hearne and Dr Mary P. Murphy. Participatory Action Research: a Human Rights and Capability Approach
https://www.re-invest.eu/images/docs/books/PAHRCA_Part_1_The_Theory_2019_Digital.pdf
- 2 Arjun Appadurai. The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition. In Culture and Public Action. Rao, Vijayendra and Michael Walton (ed). Stanford University Press. 2004. The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition

