

REGAL: research into work-life balance for vulnerable groups

1. Introduction

The issue of work-life balance is not experienced the same way by all the social groups. The evolution of European policies on this question is effective but in many European countries, especially in France, vulnerable groups, mostly women, have difficulties getting beyond the scope of circumstances and beyond self-limitation related to gender, economic situation, domestic chores and children care. In this situation, it's difficult for women to take advantage of the options offered by a better work-life balance in order to increase their employability knowing that existing regulations don't take into consideration the characteristics of these vulnerable groups

The REGAL project examines the options available in order to reach a better harmonization of work and private life in vulnerable groups, it aims at linking, the directive on work-life balance to the European Pillar for Social Rights – EPSR measure stating that equal opportunities must be encouraged in underrepresented groups. The Work-Life (WLB) measures aim at achieving a high level of employability of women and men by ensuring a better balance between family needs and job requirements.

In France our project is focused on a group of sub-Saharan women with an immigration background in vulnerable situation living for the vast majority in "district policy" of the city. The first vulnerability is related to the place of residence of women and their family. These areas witness a high level of unemployment and poverty. In these areas, according to the last figures of the "Observatoire national de la Politique de la ville"¹, the number of migrants is twice more important than the national average, 25% of families are single-parents under the care of women and three out of five are jobless (Rapport ONPV 2019). In addition to this, the rate of unemployment and poverty in these zones is important. As said, the poverty rate in the districts policy of the city is 42% in mainland France (37% in Ile de France)².

¹ : <http://www.onpv.fr/publications>

² : Pierre-Émile Bidoux, Nathalie Couleaud, with the participation of DRJSCS. « *Les quartiers de la politique de la ville en Île-de-France : La pauvreté comme dénominateur commun, mais des profils sociodémographiques différents* ». INSEE Analyses, N°57 (2017).



2. The socioeconomic position of women in France

The question of work-life balance will gradually be a major concern in the functioning of modern societies because of the role of woman and man in the management of public and private environments. This role will influence the socioeconomic position of women. However, it could be reductive to relate the issue of work-life balance and the socioeconomic situation of women only to the division if not to the decision of readjusting domestic chores that was the expression of the will of the couple. The increasing importance of woman in the professional world and the evolution of the society lead to a reassessment of her mission in the private and public environments as well as an organization of the working time that implies to take into consideration social, cultural and economic challenges.

Even if they are all interested in the issue of professional equality and work-life balance, women aren't a homogeneous group. Their economic situation is heterogeneous, it's determined by the level of education, the profession, the place of residence and of origin. Nevertheless, it's generally admitted that in spite of a high level of education and skills, a glass ceiling prevents women from achieving a professional development that match their effective level of skills and competence.

In 2015³ authors like Emilie Genin put emphasis on the difference between the three factors that can influence the socioeconomic situation of women, particularly the work-life balance. Those three elements are: family features, type of job and working hours demanded, the company policy concerning the position and role of the family. One more element that might be added is the commitment of the public authorities concerning gender equality.

In relation to the first factor, it's been observed that to carry out at once a professional career, domestic chores, spouse life and children care remain a challenge for many women. As demonstrated by the recent studies on this topic⁴, 56% of women from the generation Y with at least one child to care at think that it's difficult, if not very difficult to balance work life and private life. Family pressures lie mainly on women and are the causes of professional disparities between men and women. If, in France, few women change their professional behaviors at the birth of the first child, everything changes at the second child (around one-third of women with a second child shift to part-time job and one-third stop working) and more, at the coming of the third born (close to two-third stop working)⁵. A report of the Conseil Economique, Social et Environnemental of march 2012 indicates that in spite of the developments between men and women in the family care, men involved three times less in domestic chores than women and 40% of women undergo a professional

³ : Emilie Genin : « *Technologies mobiles et travail à la maison : mise à disposition ou mode de conciliation ?* »
Revue Intervention Economique n°53 (2015)

⁴ : Pew Research Center Social & Demographic Trends. "On Pay Gap, Millennial Women Near Parity – For Now: Despite Gains, Many See Roadblocks Ahead" (December 2013)

⁵ : « *Investir pour l'articulation vie familiale et vie professionnelle et l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes* ». France Stratégie. Juin 2016



change after a birth⁶. It must be reminded that at the same job level, there's a disparity of 6 % on gross hourly salaries between man and woman (INSEE, 2016). The reasons are multiple. They're related to differences in working time, family burden within work-life balance, careers ruined by maternity leaves, part-time jobs (imposed on mothers), opacity around salary grids, dominant images that legitimate the theory that men must earn more. All these factors have an impact on the socioeconomic situation of women. Therefore in spite of the increase in the level of education and professional experience, women in the private sector gained an average of 18 % less than men, acknowledges the research⁷ on the net hourly wage between 1995 and 2015. This average hides strong disparities according to the age of single women: the salary gap between men and women is established at around 7 % at all age for workers without children, whereas it's of 23 % between fathers and mothers. Mothers earned 11 % less than fathers at 25 years and 25 % less at 45 years.

This increase of the gap between fathers and mothers is firstly explained by an hourly net salary smaller for mothers after the birth of a child (between 2 and 3 %) than those of fathers with similar competences, working in the same company which received 3 % increase. « *The law provides an equal pay between men and women, but it's noted that women are overrepresented in companies that poorly pay their workers and these are companies close to their place of residence* », explains Elise Coudin, co-writer of the study.

The misconception from social and professional environments on women influence their behavior and their representation of the concept of work-life balance. It's not by chance if in 2015, the Observatoire de l'équilibre des temps et de la parentalité en entreprise and the Union nationale des associations familiales (UNAF) noted in a survey that 63% of women between 25 and 35 years are convinced that maternity constitutes a stop in their career. This conclusion is more alarming when one considers that women surveyed are deemed to be the leaders of tomorrow. Furthermore, close to 60% of workers think that they lack time daily, according to a survey published in June 2016 on the behalf of the Observatoire de l'équilibre des temps et de la parentalité en entreprise and the UNAF. This figure increases to reach 80% in the category of mothers, opposed to 64% at the fathers' side. As noticed the perception of the challenges of work-life balance by the world of work and culture and the policy of the company impacts on the socioeconomic position of women and on the development of social interactions. The issue of work-life balance is not only economic; it also concerns the foundations of patriarchal societies that confine women to domestic chores and children care. It assesses the processes of socialization that encourage professional gender segregation. A research in France on the behalf of the Commissariat Général à la stratégie et à la prospective – CGSP⁸ and coordinated by Marie-Cécile Naves and Vanessa Wisnia-Weill underlines that close to half of job positions held by women are concentrated in 11 out of 86 professional

⁶ : Hélène Fauvel : « *Les femmes éloignées du marché du travail* ». Les Etudes du Conseil Economique Social et Environnemental - CESE (Février 2014)

⁷ : Élise Coudin, Sophie Maillard, SSP Lab, Insee et Maxime Tô, Institut des Politiques publiques : « *Entreprises, enfants : quels rôles dans les inégalités salariales entre femmes et hommes ?* » INSEE Analyses n°44 (Fév. 2019)

⁸ : Marie-Cécile Naves et Vanessa Wisnia-Weill : « *Lutter contre les stéréotypes filles / garçons*. Commissariat Général à la stratégie et à la prospective – CGSP (2014)



families surveyed. A progression of diversity in most qualified jobs and a diminution of its in less qualified jobs have been noted. The inequality between the professional trajectories of women and men, the unequal division of time allowed to domestic and parental duties and to the separation of gender in employment impact the way children perceive gender stereotypes. This encourages the gender divisions in educational and professional orientations.

In this global environment, women with immigration background undergo the effects of this situation more than others. Unluckily their number is constantly growing in France (2,6 millions). They constitute more than 50% of the migrant population and 48% of foreigners. We are witnessing a womanization of immigration and greater uncertainty regarding the level of their employment and the one of their remuneration. In 2006: 46% of migrant women are employed, 18% are unemployed and we observe a decrease in the skills of graduate women due to the fact that they're compelled to accept low wage jobs⁹. The Observatoire national des zones urbaines sensibles in a 2011 report echoes that 52,6% of migrant families with an immigration background live in districts policies of the city. This figure is 64% in the Parisian region. Every time there is a political commitment to apply equal pay, resistances, suspicions if not, rejection arise from numbers of employers. The question is to know how to implement the principle of equality before the law recognised by the country. In France a decree on equal pay between women and men sanctions companies of more than 50 employees with a penalty equal to euros 5000 if they don't put in place the process of salary adjustment. But what about the others sectors that employ less than 50 people where migrant women are over represented? More than 60% of them are working in the « care » sector. Women face multiple barriers to employment.

The work-life balance is a major challenge for women employment. In Ile-de-France, 21 % of women workers are on part-time job oppose to 8 % of men. This part-time working endured has an impact on women wages (and therefore on their life conditions and autonomy) as well as on their career. These issues are more vital when those women are single parents, when they live in situation of lone-parenthood, when they are far from employment areas and/or work in shifts or in weekends.

Note that migrant women targeted in our study live for the majority of them in districts policy of the city. In these areas we have ¼ of single parents families, a weak social diversity is seen, twice as many foreigners, three women out of five are jobless, and when they do 55% are on permanent contracts. They work in night shifts and far from their place of residence.

Public policies encourage the employability of women and there is a complete social protection system and a method of care that enables them to find a better work-life balance. However it appears that it's mainly the wealthiest social categories and the middle class that benefit more from the opportunities offered by public policies.

In this overall context, what's the situation of migrant women targeted by our study that find themselves in this situation of social vulnerability?

⁹ : Enquête Trajectoires et origines : « *Enquête sur la diversité des populations en France* ». INED, INSEE (2012)



3. The precarious situation of women and single women with children

The socioeconomic situation of migrant women from sub-Saharan Africa and from Muslim countries confirm the diagnoses made at the European level on the multifaceted issues that hinder the social and professional integration of women (Eurocities of december 2017)¹⁰.

In France, the combination of certain factors (low language proficiency, deficiency of employment, discrimination, and socioeconomic insecurity) is so difficult to bear for women that they're compelled to develop survival strategies. This factor hinders the needs and expectations, of migrant women as far as their family and professional future is concerned because they're trapped in their vulnerability. Moreover, this precariousness is often used both by women themselves as a strategy to gain « access to employment » in exchange of poor salaries and by the employer himself as exploited workforce. On a more general level, in spite of the commitment of national and European policies, this situation blocks the access of women to the employment market and to a better balance Man/Women. It also shows the uniqueness of women needs and experiences that haven't sufficiently been taken into consideration by public policies of governments. At this time when gender equality and its effectiveness come back to the fore within EU, the integration of migrant women and their access to employment need special attention in order to get them out of their vulnerability and the associated risks of social discrimination.

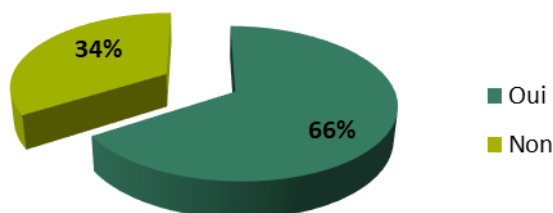
In a holistic manner, migrants from sub-Saharan countries face a socioeconomic insecurity. This situation is related firstly to a social downgrading found among graduate migrants and on the other hand to the socio-professional profile of some of the migrants. The study *Trajectoires et origines* (2012) shows that the risk related to unemployment is two times higher among migrants from sub-Saharan and Maghreb countries. It's noted in the field that people from an African immigrant background are indeed those which face more difficulties in their vocational integration pathways with a rate of unemployment higher than the one of French people from the same social status. The study achieved by the Grdr in 2012 on the topic of schooling and parenthood of people from immigrant background¹¹ shows that 34% of that sampled people are unemployed. This survey also shows that women are involved in job sectors that need fewer skills with low wages.

¹⁰ : Conseil de l'Europe : « *Les migrations sous l'angle de l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes: donner aux femmes les moyens d'être des actrices essentielles de l'intégration* ». Assemblée parlementaire. Résolution 2244 (2018)

¹¹ : Grdr (Migration, citoyenneté, développement) « *Etude : Scolarisation des enfants de migrants d'origine subsaharienne en France* ». DAIC (2012)

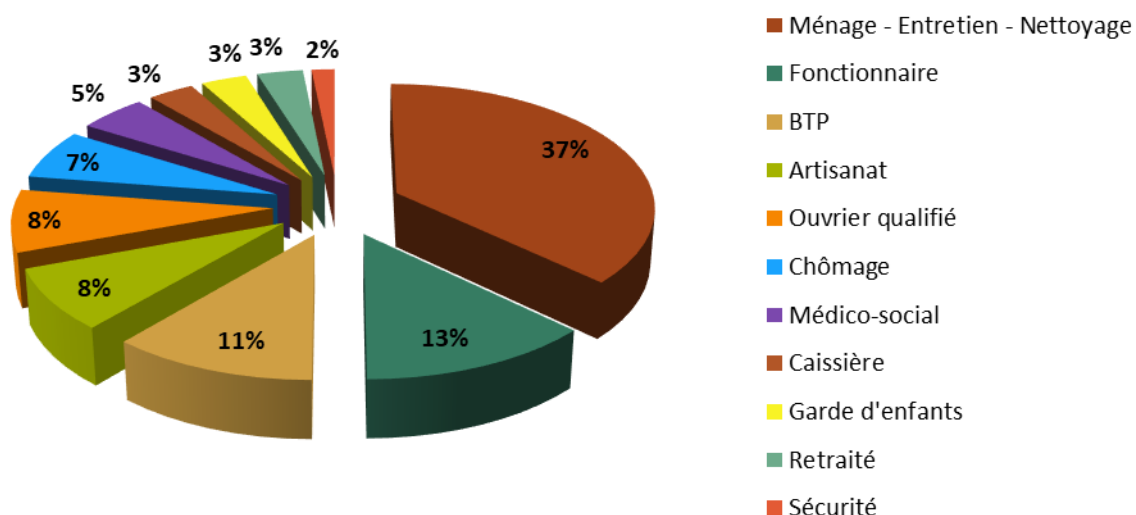


Exercice d'un emploi



We are in front of an audience in which the majority performs roles that request low skills (see the board of sectors of activities below).

Secteurs d'activités



The other important finding is the percentage (37%) of people that works in the household and maintenance sector. This figure shows an increasing presence of women at work.

The access of women to the employment market raises the question of work-life balance within family. This problem is not specific to African families; nevertheless it appears particularly acute in the context of immigration from the Senegal River Basin. Women of that region go to work as soon as children, mostly girls, are capable of taking care of their younger ones. This strategy aims at circumventing the rules that assign women to childcare. Household duties, small children education are indeed traditionally carried out by women.



<https://www.regalproject.eu/>

Co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union (2014-2020)

In addition to difficulties to access employment, working hours, transportation time are also important factors underline in different interviews, particularly those with the association leaders that insist on the fact that women have few time available to take care of their children. Women working for maintenance companies do the cleaning so they must get out early, at 6am and come back later between 9-10am and sometimes they go back once at 6pm and return home at 9pm. Our interlocutors insisted on the fact that women do cleaning in offices; accept night shifts because of their family and children and that has an impact on the education of children.

The study *Trajectoires et Origines* (2012) shows that the professional activity of men is at 97% whereas 28% of the remunerated job is part-time. This figure shows us that 17% part-time timetables are chosen by women particularly for family reasons in order to care of children. Moreover the survey emphasizes another aspect of women part-time employment particularly in districts policy of the city ; this concerns « unfinished » work imposed on women. Women are willing to work more but they face factors related to their employability, social condition and to discrimination. It also appears through this study that the risk, for migrant women, to undergo part-time job rather than getting a full-time job decreases with the level of education achieved and age.

Constraints related to sex and immigration influence the employability of migrant women and make work-life balance more difficult to implement in their group than the average in women from French origin. This situation can neither be explained by the burden of home community nor by the patriarchal system whereby household chores are assigned to women. It's the consequence of an economic precariousness that forces women to develop strategies of survival in order to meet the basic needs.

This precariousness forces women to accept low pay job and difficult working conditions. A gender ethnic specialization is also noted. In the sector of service to the person (the biggest job provider to migrant women all over the world), some employers consider that women should be exploited merciless and be available on request 24hours a day. These types of job don't only involve migrant without degree but also the graduate ones that have no choice than to accept due to lack of professional opportunities. These different findings on the socioeconomic situation of migrant women make us to think the issue of work-life balance in relation to the problem of gender equality and fight against cumulated discrimination suffered by women.

In this context what are the barriers to a better work-life balance?

- ***Deskilling and concentration in services to individuals***

In their countries of origin, many graduated women are obliged to choose jobs like childcare and services to the individuals for survival. Here deskilling concerns more particularly graduated women that face difficulties to make recognize the credentials achieved in the country of origin and that are obliged to accept unskilled or relatively unskilled jobs.



- **Cumulated discrimination**

An action-oriented survey of Grdr (2012) in African families of Île de France shows that 37% of these women work in the household and maintenance sector¹². Women suffered from cumulated discriminations as women, migrants, living in poor areas. Access to employment is complicated for these women due to their scarcity and to their migrant women oriented aspect, especially towards household jobs, without any concerns regarding their professional paths or their degrees.

- **The (no) access to common law**

Migrant women and migrant people generally have difficulties in counting on common law. More often isolated, living out of any social circuit, weakened by a socio-economic precariousness, compelled to manage a variety of administrative difficulties, and sometimes in a situation of administrative dependence, dependence on French, dependence on their husbands, sometimes on their children, some of them have a poor knowledge of common law, of their rights and opportunities.

These barriers compelled women, for their survival, to imagine strategies that could help them manage both their family duties and work. A European project of Grdr by name Equal and dealing with work-life balance of migrant women from Senegal and Mauritania was carried out in 2008, in Normandy. This project already pointed out the fact that migrant women coming in as part of family reunion started to work only when the children, mainly girls, are able to take care of their younger brothers. This strategy aims at circumventing the rules that assign women to childcare.

In France, the situation of migrant women in the job market, in social and cultural life and within urban spaces show a multilevel evolution of women right.

4. An overview of the facilities and regulations to create a work-life balance

The work-life balance is a concept that encompasses decisions and measures taken by public authorities, enterprises, organizations or individuals to facilitate interaction between private environment and professional environment for the profit of people. The European pact for equality between women and men (2011-2020), adopted in 2011 by the European Council, aims at encouraging state-members to promote a better work-life balance by improving childcare services and the provision of care to others dependent people and by developing harmonization of working times.

The question of harmonization of family life and work life has regularly been underlined in public debate during the period (1980-2020). It's at the crossroads of various social issues such as gender inequality, professional inequalities, children education, and relation man/woman in family life, the

¹² : Grdr (Migration, citoyenneté, développement. Etude « *Scolarisation des enfants de migrants d'origine subsaharienne en France* ». DAIC, 2012



birthrate and the aging of European population. This question that is found in the European agenda varies at a governmental level depending on the national environments and priorities.

If work-life balance is often perceived mainly as harmonisation of family life and professional life, it's extended on a more large scale as to the access and the retention of women employment, gender equality. Its emergence is linked to the changes in family forms, to the reconstruction of standards and the roles of gender within the family and the concerns of dematerialization and digitization as well as individual and family welfare. These elements lead to rethink the relationship between work and time. They contribute to turn (professional, associative, familial, civic) work-life balance into both an individual and collective concern. They raise questions on the place and role of the different stakeholders that can facilitate a positive work-life balance.

In France public authorities have started to reorient family policy during the years 1970s before the recommendations of the European Union that introduced the paternal leave right and the shaping of a children care policy. During the 80s familial policy has grown and adapted itself to the progressive installation of women in the job market, particularly with the implementation of the mechanisms of help to parents in order to enable them not to be obliged to choose between working and making children. The promotion of work-life balance gradually enforced itself in the French familial policy since the beginning of 1980 with the development of children care centers and the implementation of parental leave. But this harmonization aims at maintaining the birthrate and not at achieving the goal of gender equality. Concerning the professional equality we have to wait till the beginning of 2000 to see the question of work-life balance being introduced and discussed. However it's obvious that the relation between familial policies and professional equality policies has not yet been established. The problem of incentives to rebalance the division of household chores considering the place of men within the family cocoon compare to the model of the double liquidity provider and dual « career », remains capital.

The government impulses and creates the legislative framework and infrastructures to help for a better work-life balance, however to be carry out effectively it needs the involvement of economic stakeholders, civil partnership, syndicates. It's therefore important for the stakeholders to understand that a better work-life balance is profitable not only to the family but constitutes an economic and social value-added for the country as put by Jérôme Ballarin, President of the Observatoire de l'Equilibre des Temps et de la Parentalité en Entreprise (OPE): *“ Work-life balance is a major concern in a society whereby hyper-connectivity and digitization reduce the frontier between personal and professional life every day. ”*

In order to support the government commitment, every public, associative and professional stakeholder must be mobilized to strengthen the role of women in the professional world and the one of men in the family. The work-life balance is concerned with social and professional equality that must also involve the most vulnerable social categories in their desire to access to undergone employment from the fact that they are confined to part-time job as the study of *Trajectoires et Origines* of 2012 shows. Marie-Andrée Blanc, President of the National union of family associations emphasizes that: *“The conciliation of family life and professional life is concerned with professional equality that must not be underrated but make mothers and fathers to come together towards a more serene harmonization with their family life. At this time of change of standards in the labour*



law, it's particularly important that work-life balance becomes a right by integrating systematically this issue in company negotiations. "

The call for community of the beginning of year 2000 to the "modernization" of familial policies is firstly related to economic employment preoccupations as well as to competitiveness: the goal is to promote the participation of women to the job market in conformity with the objectives of the European Strategy for Employment put in place at the end of the year 1990.

The rule of parental leave, the right to take care of one's small child have been recognized in the directive on the parental leave adopted in 1996.

Marlène Schiappa, Secretary of State to Equality between men and women: *" The harmonization of professional life/family life has been considered for long as relevant to the responsibility of women only. However it's only by a coordinated commitment of public authorities, the world of employment and individuals - women and men – that it will be possible to put an end to the "mother ceiling". The public authorities have huge margins of progression. We are working on them. I greet the companies that in association with the OPE have decided to take hold of this question of parenthood. Every worker (man or woman) must feel free to organize its work-life balance as desired but this is related to the guarantee of exercise of rights and guarantee to infrastructure access (such as childcare mode) by the government, and by the commitment of employers. It's within the framework of these two conditions that everyone can experience fulfillment."*

Social policy, familial policy need to be better harmonize to cope with social disparities and the heterogeneity of social conditions of women.

The law of august 4, 2014 proposes strong measures to improve the daily condition of women and change mindsets. One of the priorities of this act is to guarantee new means for professional equality and strengthen a better work-life balance with the reinforcement of branch and company negotiation for the sake of professional equality, the reform of parental leave and the experimentation of the third-party payment system for childcare assistants.

The situation of migrant women in France is at the crossroad of public policies in cooperation with different ministries. And the challenges of work-life balance for migrant women must be analyzed taking into consideration this intersectionality. On the other hand, it's important to note that policies around the situation of migrants in France has long been analyzed only on a male point of view.

It can indeed been observed a late positioning of top executives concerning the roles of migrant women in the policies of integration, of employment. It must be explained that during several years women came in France in the context of family reunion. The evolution of the migrant project of women and their important number (more than 50 % of migrants) lead the public authorities and associative actors to take position on women integration.

As from 2014 a report of the ministry of women rights suggested strong measures to enforce women integration. The report underlined the question of methods of care as an important concern for the professional activity of women and the necessity to provide better tools to facilitators and take into consideration for the Convention of social work in 2014 the issue of a better integration of gender equality.



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

In the REGAL project the Grdr composed a group of 12 women linked together by the facts that they face (or have been facing) problems of migrant work-life balance (born abroad), they live in Ile de France and are women involved in associative and /or entrepreneurial projects. However, contrary to prejudged ideas, these women are not only spouses, mothers under the influence of the home community. They create economic, social or associative initiatives to succeed in their social and economic integration of the host country. Because of the global economic and social crisis most of them turn to self-employment.

This involvement implies a new concern in the work-life balance. Indeed, in addition to the requirements of the work-life balance is the question of associative involvement.

To apprehend the feeling, the perception that women have of the work-life balance, the Grdr put in place an elaborated process of 5 pillars: the egoscopy or « experiential profile», biographical life story, the identification of themes and shared issues, the declination of shared issues through meetings with resource persons, the highlighting of trajectories and individual and collective expectations. It must be observe that the methodological process put in place is being built around a cross analysis between trajectories and individual expectations of every woman and the highlighting of thee trajectories and expectations in a collective perspective.

The following key words came out in focus groups: Deskilling, Single mother, Colour of skin, Pregnant women, Discrimination, Immigration, Children, Involvement, Preconceptions, Politics, Highlighting, Equality.

These concepts are not neutral; they are a substance of the socio-economic situations of women and their relationship with the world of employment and the host society. They verify the barriers identified for an effective work-life balance. Women with whom the GRDR has worked together in this program have many social and economic roles; they are spouses, mothers, entrepreneurs and associative managers.

The fact that they raise the problem of children is revelatory. They therefore imply the thematic related to children care. If it's true that the new generation of migrant women is more autonomous, less influenced by the home community factor, nevertheless, they are particularly the ones living in areas of the city where vulnerability is common, where usual public services disappear one after the other. The other factor to consider concerning these migrant women is the strong inclination to interiorize the idea that domestic chores are their duties. Emilie Genin reminds in his article¹³ that the harmonization of family life/ work life is « *the idea a person has of what the compatibility of his professional life and other aspects of his social times is like.*», this representation is strongly influenced, in the case of migrant women by family characteristics and by the social and cultural capital.

¹³ : Emilie Genin : « *Technologies mobiles et travail à la maison : mise à disposition ou mode de conciliation ?* » Revue Intervention Economique n°53 (2015)



The second key concepts evoked by women when talking of work-life balance are related to integration policies (fight against discrimination, social and professional downgrading, employability, preconceptions). This statement explains the difficulties that many women face in their integration process. In fact some of them must face obstacles linked to social and gender relationships, country of origin and immigration. To live in areas where social and economic diversity is absent adds to the feeling of isolation and *ghettoisation*. Urban discrimination has some effects on the social and economic participation of women and on their social and familial time management. Didier Lapeyronnie¹⁴, thinks that the ghetto is a French reality and appears as « *the result of racial segregation, poverty, social relegation. The population that lives there is more or less forced to do that for social and racial reasons. But the ghetto is also built from within. It's an urban territory separated in which the population or at least a group in it has ended up building specific ways of living, visions of the world organised around intrinsic values; in short a form of social organization that enables them to face social difficulties and confronts wounds inflicted on them by the society* ».

Discriminations are today a social reality acknowledged by political figures and civil society. Eurobarometers, dedicated to discriminations report that 79% of people in France think that ethnic discriminations are rampant, that's to say the 2nd score within the highest in Europe, just behind the Netherlands (80%).

As part of our project, women have been able to tell the true stories and difficulties they have faced. What allowed to underline some key topics we have compared to key words from the analysis of the exercises of egoscopy and experiential profile.

The issues underlined are discriminations, violence, immigration, education, involvement, work, integration concerning access to employment, children education and their involvement.

However it's important to range, if not, to separate obstacles that are common to many women of lower class from those that are more related to their situation of migrant women. Women prefer to bring into light obstacles that hinder their integration, presence and visibility in public space. This expresses the dominant feeling whereby the work-life balance concern only women and that they are the one to manage it.

Without falling in cultural determinism it must be emphasized that many women, particularly those immigrating for family reunion reasons have accepted the idea of a gendered division of domestic chores. Another element is related to the positioning of women and their role in the family and public space. In the most pauperized and segregate quarters gender base social relationship suffered transformations unfavourable to women rights: this evolution is less linked to « culture » of migrant groups than to the increasing decay of urban space that contributes to the emergence of visions of the world and remote practices and sometimes contrary to those in use in most of the social spaces¹⁵.

The third element indicates that the question of work-life balance still remains for many people in the private and individual sphere hence proposed responses remain strictly individual and familial. However as Marie-Andrée Blanc, President of the National union of family associations points it right:

¹⁴ : Didier Lapeyronnie : « *Ghetto urbain. Ségrégation, violence, pauvreté en France aujourd'hui* », Paris, Robert Laffont, coll. « Le monde comme il va » (2008)

¹⁵ : Rapport MINISTRE DES DROITS DES FEMMES « *L'égalité pour les femmes migrantes* » Olivier Noblecourt (20 février 2014).



«The conciliation of family life and professional life is concerned with professional equality that must not be underrated but make mothers and fathers to come together towards a more serene harmonization with their family life. At this time of change of standards in the labour law, it's particularly important that work-life balance becomes a right by integrating systematically this issue in company negotiations».

Women stories on the harmonization of the professional life and other commitments have enable them to tackle their life project and their life of citizen in France. The work-life balance is part of a range of issues that women are attempting to overcome by showing ingenuity in *“building specific ways of living, visions of the world organized around intrinsic values; in short a form of social organization that enables them to face social difficulties and confront wounds inflicted on them by the society »* (cf. Lapeyronnie. Didier¹⁶).

Women examine the question of work-life balance in the light of challenges concerning gender, discriminations, employability and public policies that concern them at the national level as well as at local level. The challenge being to commit oneself to apprehend the spaces of creation of a proactive citizenship and modes of construction of a social and economic positioning that enable them to reinforce their autonomy.

6. The gaps between the real and the legislative world

The different measures put in place by French authorities for work-life balance have had various impacts on the actual life of many families particularly through the implementation of childcare centers and the allocation of social benefit. these measures also have the advantage to help to learn more about the family function by interviewing association public facilitators. Legal documents have set the framework for a gender equality. However in spite of the legislative framework, discrepancies in the practice in various domains have been observed due to sticking points in some companies and also the resistance of some men. The question of work-life balance is related to gender equality. In this way the law of august 4, 2014 for actual gender equality has permitted to put in place many measures in the employment world:

- Ban on access to public procurement contracts (Government, territorial collectivity, etc.) to enterprises violating the requirements of professional equality;
- The enterprises of more than 50 employees must from now on deposit their agreement or action plan related to professional equality at the Direction Régionale des Entreprises, de la Concurrence, de la Consommation, du Travail et de l'Emploi (DIRECCTE), or be subjected to financial penalties ;
- The parental leave is reformed in order to increase the rate of women employment and encourage the sharing of parental responsibilities ;
- The discriminative dismissals linked to sexual harassment are increasingly punished by the industrial tribunal.

¹⁶ : Didier Lapeyronnie : « *Ghetto urbain. Ségrégation, violence, pauvreté en France aujourd'hui* », Paris, Robert Laffont, coll. « Le monde comme il va » (2008)



However in the actual world, discrepancies are observed between regulations and actual women situations. Women often work at part-time, are generally in low wages employment; when they succeed in getting in high rated job, they are confronted with glass ceiling. In addition to wage inequalities women and men don't have equal access to employment. Women more often face precarious job or part-time job particularly in low class. They face direct barriers (training, non-employment diversity) and indirect ones (mobility, children care, family situation) to the access of employment in addition to the fact that they are responsible of the large part of household chores. Legislative documents constitute a real progress however they don't sufficiently take into consideration key aspects we have noticed throughout our project with the target population.

The social investment policies answer to the need of encouraging birthrate to counter demographic aging, developing services to reduce poverty risks among children (the poverty of children is always low in houses where both parents are employed) and of encouraging access to employment among women. However it's observed, in spite of the political commitment, that the societal challenge is that the social investment approach also integrates the societal goal of gender equality by considering the differentiated impact of the facilities on women and men or more by considering that the work-life balance is not transposed in reality. Marlène Schiappa, Secretary of State for gender equality recalls that: *"The harmonization of professional life/family life has been considered for long as relevant to the responsibility of women only. However it's only by a coordinated commitment of public authorities, the world of employment and individuals - women and men – that it will be possible to put an end to the "mother ceiling".*

In relation to the target population of our study it appears that their particular situation has not been taken into account and that there's a lack of concern of this population in relation to this issue.

The different observations made during the implementation of this program lead to examine more closely the concept of « common law » (concerning, above all, the structures of public action) and the effectivity of the principles of equality of treatment of migrant women. An analysis of intersectionalities is therefore necessary to understand the discriminations women can faced.

An initial observation concerns the low level of « visibility » of migrant women in public space areas.

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

In February 2014 the Ministry of women rights released a report entitled: « *L'égalité pour les femmes migrantes* »¹⁷. After a diagnosis of the conditions of migrant women in France, recommendations for the integration of migrant women and for gender equality have been made. This report is the conclusion of a working group composed of experts from the society and associations.

Its publication in February was followed six month later by the 4th of august 2014 law for actual gender equality that, as we emphasized it, interested few migrant women that face problems of

¹⁷ : Olivier Noblecourt : « *L'Égalité pour les femmes migrantes* ». Ministère des droits de femmes (Fév. 2014)



employability and are victims of cumulated discrimination. This report was inspired by a common finding with partners with which we work on the project: the necessity to rethink integration policies by taking into account the gendered dimension of the modes of social inclusion of women. Women have an important role to play in the social and economic life of their area in spite of some vulnerability. Therefore the transversality of public policies is important to promote their access to rights and gender equality.

Among the recommendations, an emphasis have been put on the necessity to better equip the facilitators: to include a mandatory module on gender equality in initial trainings of professional in contact with migrant women, to implement a reception integrated service with a short term integration process that include from the beginning information on women rights that open gateways to specialized associations.

Today, the financial and technical partners of GRDR at the national level share our diagnosis on the necessity to activate many levers that will enforce women employability and a work-life balance combining a territorial approach and a particular attention to the public. The territorial point of entry permits to show a multi-actors approach as we do through a project concerning women of Grigny in the Essonne area.

The conversations with our different partners like territorial collectivities show that many cities are sensitive to this problem of work-life balance. They seek particularly to put in place a crèche system for children in order to create employability conditions for women. Let's remind that in the "districts policy" of the city, one-third of families are single parents and that the children care continues to be an important obstacle in the work-life balance. Some partners also emphasize the necessity to work on images and some social codes that confine women to household chores and to children care. The question of work-life balance concern the topic of organization within family. It also implies a change of behavior among men. It must not only be considered in the perspective of family policy and must also involve the employment.

Our partnership with local collectivities shows the awareness upon the necessity to develop a global approach in order to create an effective work-life balance by working with women, men and public authorities. It must be ascertain that many local collectivities have signed the European charter for gender equality in local life. This charter put the emphasis on the necessity to deploy actions to eliminate all types of discrimination and preconceptions based on gender or ethnic origin.

Among the partners involved and mobilized in the REGAL project, the national agency of employment in France « Pôle Emploi », invited in the framework of a Focus group, presented its offer to enforce women employability. Concerning the tools put in place we can cite the help for crèche - AGEPI that aims at contributing to the childcare fee of children less than 10 years, or helping devices for employers, particularly grants and subsidies for enterprises that recruit people in precarious situations, with a device adapted for the training and the certification of people integrated in the company. Pôle Emploi has in addition recruit company assistants in the Agency to manage the relationship Enterprise/employment market.

In spite of this customized offer, we observe that women are not fully aware of the existence of these devices. This lack of information is particularly due to the fact that the Agency delegates some issues and missions to other partners with the view to subcontract public action in relation to the employment market, resulting to the fact that provisions available are not visible.



At last, concerning the vulnerability of some single parents, Pôle Emploi has designed a pilot project of experimentation in the 18th district of Paris in partnership with Association projets 19 to encourage the access to employment of single women with children. There are also customised children care services i.e.: Digitised service for periodic crèche: macygogne.fr).

The presentation of these multiple offers illustrates a contradictory situation. Indeed in spite of the declination of a significant offer that encompasses issues related to women in situation of vulnerability, the Focus group brings into light the repeating difficulty of access to information and the necessity to support women in their approaches to avoid situations of “no access” to common law as detailed in the third part of the report. In other words, it must be noted that in a context whereby diagnoses are made, challenges shared and specific devices developed, devices are still strongly underuse.

As part of the Focus Group, the meeting with the Centre de formation Esperem has also brought out many lessons. Wealthy of 50 years of experience in the support of vulnerable women, the Association has been the pioneer in the inclusion of the issue of work-life balance in the perspective of access to employment. Indeed, the association has developed children help homes and accommodation sites for single women with their children. Today, the pilot structure 5, Centre d’Hébergement et de Réinsertion Sociale (CHRS) in Paris, is equipped with crèches with mode of care customized to ease the integration process of women. This approach combining support process towards employment and inclusion of related concerns linked to parenthood has it beginning in the years 1970s for Esperem. The goal being to propose a global approach in the social support built with the view of dual temporality of social action: to respond to short term needs and work on the building of a long term professional project. Through this experimentation, Esperem participated to warn public authorities on the challenge of an approach combining employment policy and family policy, and so contributed to the creation of companies’ crèches.

Houria Saouchi, in charge of the development of network at Esperem also insists on the fact that the customisation of working hours is a requirement to really take into consideration the issues of vulnerable women. The current health crisis must encourage public authorities to reflect about the development of online work by taking into account the challenges of the work-life balance for vulnerable women.

With respect to these different elements one could think that the question of work-life balance doesn’t present the same challenges for people in a precarious situation particularly migrant women because they value the employability and the visibility in public space. But this is only the visible part of the iceberg where barriers to work-life balance are figured out. Today this issue of work-life balance of migrant women is gradually becoming a concern for public policies as we noted with the analyses of the ANCT, of Pôle Emploi and of Esperem. The Regal project has allowed for, by working with women and associative and corporate actors, initiating constructive interactions and show that the care mode is only one of the aspects of work-life balance. Many associative actors are mobilizing themselves around the government to encourage women access to employment and their role in public space as well as the role of men in family life for a better management of work-life balance.



8. Conclusion

The concepts of work-life balance and immigration are categories of public action that do not involve only one specific ministry and that must be examined at the crossroad of a diversity of actors and institutional affiliation. Firstly as we emphasize it in our text, we realized that immigration and integration policies in France have taken into consideration only later the issues that face migrant women.

Moreover, policies dealing with the challenges of work-life balance discuss the question of work-life balance from a homogenous perspective of the category of « women » without taking into account the specific situation of migrant women. This is due to the fact that for long, immigration has been associated to a male feature, this situation has increased the invisibility of women in public space.

This global approach of women conditions affect women living in precariousness without consideration of origin. This is increasingly pointed out by many observers. In our work-life balance project, our assumption was that laws voted didn't sufficiently take into account the situation of vulnerable women.

Indeed we note through different reports and case studies that the socio-economic status impacts on the positioning of woman and her relation to work-life balance. The goal is not to categorize women or to recommend legislative incentives specific to women in precarious situation but to warn and act upon the constraints and barriers that reject an important category of women from devices designed to contribute to gender equality.

The risks of precariousness are multifactorial and find their origin in the cultural background of women in the society including employment. One can say that the situation of migrant women met in this project is similar to those of French women of lower class. However factors like ethnic origin, place of residence and discrimination accentuate their difficulties to harmonize family life and professional life.

So, from the standpoint of category of public action, of literature and research, the concern around work-life balance for migrant women is a modern challenge whose outlines have not yet been shaped. Either we find content in terms of public policy on the work-life balance for women without discrimination for migrant women or we find a quite thorough literature on the integration and the situation of migrant women in France but in a very male perspective.

This project is therefore being built in a sphere of public action still very poorly identified in the perspective of institution and literature. The lessons deduced from the assessment of individual trajectories and cross issue of women participating in experimentation will be profitable and will allowed for defining new research perspectives that will be deepened to bring light to some shadow zones of public action in France.

Moreover the mobilization of contact persons, of decision-making people, of institutional actors and notable figures within the focus group also permit to compare individual and collective experiences of migrant women on the topic of work-life balance with the positioning of these actors around these challenges.



This project has enabled women to grasp the challenges related to work-life balance and to also share resources and skills mobilized to solve them. The institutional associative partnerships impulse by this project has permitted to provide visibility to women actions, to associate political decision makers, operators and associations to the reflection on work-life balance of migrant women to conclude by the courses of actions to encourage women integration, their access to employment, and to a better work-life balance.

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