

Estonia

Introduction to Work-Life Balance

In 2019, the employment rate on the Estonian labour market rose to the first among the countries of the European Union, but still several structural challenges need to be solved by the state. Work-life balance under the competence of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the institutions managed by it, such as the Social Insurance Board, the Health Board, the Labour Inspectorate of Estonia and the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund are regulated by several legislations and need to be discussed at national level in the changed circumstances after the Covid-19 pandemic. (Good to know - guide for employers, 2020)

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, the perception of the workplace, remote work and reconciliation of work and family life has changed and has challenged employers, forcing them to rethink values and work principles. Among other things, this has meant the introduction of various digital solutions, raising the digital competences of employees, enabling remote work, supporting the balance of work and family life, etc. The Covid-19 crisis has also highlighted social inequalities and made the situation of people with socio-economic difficulties even more difficult. The socio-economic situation of women and men is not equal, gender gaps persist in many areas of life, and it is expected that gender inequality will increase during times of crisis and emergency situations. The pandemic has set back equality between women and men and reversed previous achievements in the field of gender equality. Family members who have family-related care responsibilities are in the most vulnerable position when it comes to balancing work and family life. (Haugas & Sepper, COVID-19 pandeemia sotsiaal-majanduslik mõju soolisele võrdõiguslikkusele, 2021)



Policies / Research on the effects of WLB

Equal treatment regulations in Estonia and the European Union

In Estonia, it is assumed that an employee works 40 hours a week, 8 hours a day, and the total working time cannot exceed an average of 48 hours per seven-day period up to a four-month accounting period. A 30-minute intraday break must be provided for a 6-hour working time. The employer and employee may agree on longer working hours if the total working time does not exceed an average of 52 hours per seven-day period during the four-month accounting period and the agreement is not unreasonably detrimental to the employee. The employer's obligation is to compensate overtime with free time in an amount equal to the overtime time or in money. When compensating overtime in money, the employer must pay the employee 1.5 times the salary. (Employment Contracts Act, 2008)

From the analysis of the data of the 2015 ISSP Estonia survey, it can be concluded that in Estonia, flexibility in the amount and time of work is considered important when combining work and family life. The implementation of working time flexibility depends on preferences on the one hand and opportunities on the other, and the possibility of the two working together. Previous studies (Täht & Mills, 2016) have shown that the positive effect of working time flexibility on reconciling work and family life depends on the one hand to a very large extent on the general institutional framework - whether and to what extent flexibility is encouraged and enabled at the level of laws and legislation - and on the other hand, about the extent to which this work and family life arrangement is the choice and preference of the households themselves. (Täht K., 2016)

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the European Commission and the Council of the European Union have made it a priority to improve the possibilities of reconciling work and private life and emphasized the need to enable parents in all European countries to reconcile their paid and unpaid work. In Estonia, the employer's obligations and the employee's rights to equal treatment and reconciliation of work and family life are regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, the Equal Treatment Act, the Gender Equality Act, the Employment Act. (Good to know - guide for employers, 2020)



In the European Union, the employer's obligations and the employee's rights to equal treatment and reconciliation of work and family life are regulated by Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 20 June 2019, Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, 5 July 2006, European the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the Union and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Article 33 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that the family is under legal, economic and social protection, and in order to be able to reconcile family and working life, everyone has the right to protection against dismissal due to pregnancy and childbirth, the right to paid maternity leave and parental leave after the birth or adoption of a child. (Charter of Fundamental Rights, 2010) Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council, 20 June 2019 (2) sets the minimum requirements for paternity, parental and carer's leave and flexible work arrangements for working parents and carers. The minimum requirements aim to achieve equality between men and women in terms of labour market opportunities and treatment at work, making it easier for working parents or carers to reconcile work and family life. (Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, 2019)

The European Parliament, Directorate- General for Communication commissioned a new Flash Eurobarometer survey in 2022 to gather women's opinions on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on violence against women, mental health and women's working lives. As a result of the survey, it was found that about three-quarters (77%) of women across the EU think that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in physical and emotional violence against women in their country. In 25 out of 27 Member States, a majority of women think that the Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in physical and emotional violence against women in their country. In four countries, about a quarter of respondents know of women in their circle of friends and family who have experienced domestic violence or abuse since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. (Maggio, et al., 2022)



Studies during the Covid-19 pandemic

In Estonia, during the pandemic, various institutions studied the impact of the crisis on work and family life from different aspects. The Political Research Center Praxis, the Estonian Applied Research Center CentAR and the University of Tartu studied the impact of the crisis on the economy regionally (Laurimäe & Koppel, Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19: The Regional Impact of the Pandemic, 2022), the socio-economic impact on young people (Haugas, Allemann, & Anniste, The socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young people, 2021), on the elderly and gender equality, and the impact of the crisis on people with disabilities (Sepper & Anniste, 2022) and parents of disabled children. (Laurimäe & Koppel, Socio-economic impact of COVID-19: Measures to support the unemployed and prevent poverty, 2021)

The non-profit organization Peasjad (NGO Head Matters) has studied the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on mental health in order to raise low awareness of the impact of remote work on the human psyche. When doing remote work, more attention must be paid to psychosocial risk factors, the occurrence of which can increase work stress. In a new and stressful situation, where the work demands exceed the employee's ability to cope with them and the person perceives a contradiction between the challenges presented by the work environment and their coping options, severe mental and physical health problems may manifest, such as burnout and depression, difficulty concentrating, problems at home, drug and alcohol abuse, poor physical health, cardiovascular diseases and musculoskeletal problems. (The Labour Inspectorate of Estonia, 2022)

Many of the mental health problems are preventable and treatable — with help, people can fully recover or successfully cope with their condition, live as full a life as possible and contribute to the functioning of society. In order to mitigate the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on mental health, the NGO Peasjad has prepared guidelines for employees and employers to mitigate psychosocial risk factors. The Ministry of Social Affairs, the Estonian Employers' Union, the Health Development Institute, the Labour Inspectorate, the Employment Fund and the Estonian Personnel Management Association PARE contributed to the completion of the mental health electronic first



aid cabinet coordinated by the NGO Peasjad. The creation of a first aid kit designed to support the team and yourself was supported by the European Social Fund. (Mental health first aid kit, 2022)

Changes in legislation - more flexible work arrangements

Parents have more flexibility and independence in using child leave

With the new amendment to the Family Benefits Act adopted in 2016, from April 1, 2022, parental leave will be granted to both parents in an employment relationship separately and considering each child. The change in the law allows parents more flexibility and individuality when using child leave and gives parents the opportunity to plan child leave together at the same time. Single families now have the opportunity to plan vacations more flexibly - in the case of both parental leave and parental leave of a disabled child, the biological parent can give up his or her vacation days in favour of the other parent's spouse or registered life partner. (Social Insurance Board, 2022)

Responsibility when working remotely

According to Statistics Estonia, every fourth employee works remotely. (Rõtov, 2022) Wanting to implement in Estonia the framework agreement on remote work concluded by social partners at the European Union level on 16.07.2002, the Estonian Trade Union Confederation and the Estonian Employers' Confederation concluded the recommended principles for remote work. Finding that remote work in Estonia allows for the modernisation of work organisation, helps to increase the productivity and competitiveness of companies, by enabling a better reconciliation of the work and family life of employees, motivates employees to work better, increases the opportunities of people living in rural areas on the labour market, helps to save on transport costs and expands the opportunities of people with reduced working capacity to be busy with work, contributed Amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Act. Changes to the Occupational Health and Safety Act will enter into force on November 19, 2022 and will more clearly divide the



responsibility of the employer and the employee when performing remote work. For example, the remote work workplace is an agreement between the employee and the employer, and the employee is obliged to design a safe workplace and working conditions for remote work based on the instructions given by the employer. (There will be new requirements for organising remote work, 2022)

The employee's independent decision-making competence in working time management

The Parliament of Estonia adopted the Law on Amendments to the Employment Contracts Act and other related laws, which enter into force on August 1, 2022, and which transposes the European Union directive on transparent and predictable working conditions. The changes mainly concern the Employment Contract and the Public Service Act, specifying the protection against unfavourable treatment, stipulating the employee's right to suitable working conditions and the obligation to ensure that working or providing services for another employer does not endanger his or her own or others' life and health. (Riigi Teataja, 2022)

Initiatives

“Mental Health Vitamins” – Activities by a NGO Peaasjad

Logo



NGO Peaasjad

Topic/ Area

Balancing mental health in the workplace

Title

Mental health vitamins

Type of Initiative

- Training Programme
- Games
- Handbook/ Guidelines
- Posters



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| Date released | 2022 |
| Partners/ network | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online test • The Ministry of Social Affairs (Estonia) • the Estonian Employers' Union, • the Health Development Institute (Estonia) • the Labour Inspectorate (Estonia) • the Employment Fund (Estonia) • the Estonian Personnel Management Association PARE |
| Description of the methods/ approach | Peaasi.ee is a mental health vitamin course consisting of five themed weeks, which can be undertaken by yourself, with family, friends or a team at any time at your own pace. It is possible to familiarise yourself with the introduction of mental health vitamins, tips and advice and choose at least 1 trick to add to your daily life every week. In order not to forget your favourite tricks, you can write them on the computer or on a printed worksheet. |
| Purpose/Aim | Raising awareness of the impact of remote work on human mental health. |
| Web link | https://peaasi.ee/en/mental-health-vitamins/#1634149877171-1ee7fbf4-044a |
| References/ sources | online Mental health vitamin test : https://peaasi.ee/vitamiinitest/en/ |
| Additional notes | The creation of a first aid kit designed to support the team and yourself was supported by the European Social Fund |

“Manual Covid-19 for Organisations”

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| Logo |  |
| Topic/ Area | Estonian Human Rights Center, Aga Khan Foundation (Portugal) and Equality Strategies (Ireland) |
| Title | Diversity and Inclusion in times of global crisis |
| Type of Initiative | Manual Covid-19 for Organisations |
| Partners/ network | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handbook/ Guidelines • Aga Khan Foundation Portugal • Equality Strategies (Ireland) |



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| Description of the methods/ approach | The smart combination of remote work and office work, unique to each organisation, will be key to foster flexible work environments in the future. |
| Purpose/Aim | The manual on managing diversity in times of crisis is intended as a tool for employers who want to support their collective and are looking for solutions to better prepare themselves for future crises. The guidance material is useful both for those who want to implement important strategic changes and for employers who want to gain additional knowledge, inspiration and tools to more skillfully manage diversity in their organization. |
| Web link | https://humanrights.ee/app/uploads/2021/08/DI-in-times-of-crisis-guide.pdf |
| References/ sources | online https://www.tooelu.ee/et/uudised/216/valminud-juhend-toandjatele-mitmekesisuse-juhtimisest-kriisiajal |

“Good to know – guide for employers”

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| Logo |  |
| Topic/ Area | The Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner |
| Title | Important legislation for the employer |
| Type of Initiative | Good to know - guide for employers Handbook/ Guidelines |
| Partners/ network | European Commission project Parents@Work |
| Description of the methods/ approach | Overview of legislation governing equal treatment |
| Purpose/Aim | The purpose of the guide is to provide a concise overview of the important laws regulating equal treatment for the employer. |
| Web link | https://volinik.ee/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/checklist.pdf |