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ASSIGNMENT

IMPORTANT NOTICE

This document presents a fictitious scenario. It has been produced solely for the purpose of this exercise. All references to existing countries, international organisations, private companies, departments and their representatives, etc. have been invented purely as examples. Any views expressed should not be taken to represent the opinions of those bodies or persons. When dealing with the assignment, participants should therefore rely solely on the information presented in the exercise and not on any prior expertise in the field.

For this exercise, you will take on the role of an administrator who is asked to participate in an inter-institutional Working Group dealing with the Revision of the Employment Strategy (WGRES). The documentation you need is included in this booklet. It comprises a number of emails, reports and other information that you will have to analyse and digest in order to be able to deal properly with the assignment given to you. This is your first day in your new job.

It is important that you accept the scenario as it is presented. Although in real life you would have access to other sources of information and would be able to consult your colleagues, in this exercise you are limited to the information provided. You are, however, allowed to make logical assumptions where information is missing or incomplete. You may print the documents, rearrange them in any order you wish and add comments or make notes as necessary; these documents and your notes will remain available to you during the Oral Presentation.

This Oral Presentation aims at assessing the following competencies: Analysis & Problem Solving, Communication and Resilience. Your knowledge in the field will not be assessed; therefore, conducting additional research is unnecessary.

You are expected to prepare **a presentation** in which you give an overview of the current situation regarding employment in the European Union (EU). On the day of the Assessment Centre, you will have 5 minutes to give your presentation. This will be followed by a 15-minute question and answer session, during which the assessors will ask you specific **questions**.

**Please note:
Today is Wednesday, 7 June 20XX
Last year was 20XX-1, next year will be 20XX+1**

ABBREVIATIONS USED

ES	Employment Strategy
EU	European Union
MS	Member State(s)
WGRES	Working Group dealing with the Revision of the Employment Strategy

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In an effort to create more and better jobs for all, the European Union (EU) follows a detailed multi-annual employment strategy (ES), which has been designed to help (a) create an accurate, up-to-date overview of the employment situation across the EU, (b) identify areas in need of improvement and (c) outline specific actions to introduce necessary changes. The ES is revised periodically, via a process in which the European Commission proposes a number of updates and refinements based on the outcome of repeated consultations with experts and stakeholders. Depending on their nature, ES proposals need the approval of the Council of the EU (and sometimes of the European Parliament) before they can be implemented. The most important stakeholders at local level within the Member States (MS) are the national governments and employment agencies, professional organisations, unions, non-governmental organisations, etc.

To assess the effects of actions carried out under the ES, the EU uses — among other data — social statistics gathered by the national statistical offices of the MS and collated by the EU's statistical office as partial indicators of progress. The current ES (20XX-5 to 20XX+1) is entering its final phase this year. Input for a new ES (covering the period 20XX+2 to 20XX+8 and based on the lessons learned from the current ES) is already being collected by an informal working group, the Working Group dealing with the Revision of the Employment Strategy (WGRES). This group is currently taking a close look at the current ES and all related feedback from the parties involved, and it is assessing all available information in order to gauge the potential political impact of the new ES. WGRES's proposals will be elaborated in greater detail by the competent services. The EU then wants all recommended actions to be set up within the first year of the new ES (i.e. by the end of 20XX+2).

Stimulating employment opportunities will remain one of the top priorities for the next ES, which will continue to focus on ensuring equal access to employment for all citizens who are legally entitled to work in the EU and also on guaranteeing the equal treatment of all candidates in selection procedures, regardless of their age, gender, nationality, etc.

Additionally, the new ES will put more focus on resolving the difficulties that many people face when trying to combine their careers with the need to take care of (particularly very young) children. Currently, across the EU, an average of 26 weeks' maternity leave is provided, 16 of which are paid (as per the EU-wide minimum legal requirement introduced in 20XX-6), while the rest (the total differs from MS to MS) are both optional and unpaid. EU fathers get (on average) two weeks' paid leave when their children are born.

Welcome Mail

From: Max Weinberg, Working Group Chair, WGRES
To: <Your name>, Administrator, WGRES
Date: 07/06/20XX
Subject: Welcome

Dear <Your name>,

Welcome to the Working Group and thank you for taking on your role so quickly.

In order to get you properly settled into your new job, I have already compiled and sent you some documents that might be useful for you.

I have also scheduled in a meeting for us to discuss some issues before the next WGRES meeting.

Kind regards,

Max

Strategy Excerpt

07/03/20XX-5

EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY 20XX-5 TO 20XX+1 (SUMMARY)

[...]

GOALS**• Work-life balance for parents**

EU-supported actions should focus mostly on improving the work-life balance for working parents, both by promoting the rights of parents and by increasing the options available to them for spending time with their children.

Actions could also be taken to (a) raise EU citizens' and companies' awareness of the recent change to the EU Directive on Parental Rights in the Workplace (which extended the minimum period of paid maternity leave from 14 to 16 weeks) and (b) create more part-time positions for parents.

• Promoting equal opportunities

One major goal is to reach the overall employment target (specifically, an employment rate of 60 % by 20XX+1). To guarantee equal opportunities, favouring certain applicants over others for reasons of gender should always be considered discrimination, except in exceptional and justifiable circumstances, which must be clearly set out and made known in advance.

[...]

Working conditions in EU MS

As part of our continued analysis of workforce trends, we examine the latest developments in employment and their possible consequences.

Finding work

Many unemployed people struggle to find work, with employment rates varying drastically according to education level. Employment rates are lower for less well-educated individuals, who often face difficulties forging a career as a result of their limited skill set. Moreover, both men and women find it more difficult to make a career change later in their working lives and very often need to undergo retraining to do so.

In addition, many women have reported difficulties securing their first professional position. To give young women a boost at the start of their careers, companies could introduce separate selection procedures for men and women (certainly in the earlier phases of the process), as this will ensure that all candidates have an equal opportunity to progress.

A number of innovative measures in individual MS were recently tested to find creative approaches to ensuring equal opportunities. One such initiative came from MS Libria, which recently implemented a system of government funding for paid internships, leading to beneficial arrangements for companies and interns alike.

Parents

While the EU's efforts under the current ES have contributed greatly to improving working conditions and creating more flexibility across MS systems, surveys from 20XX-1 reveal that many parents would like to have greater flexibility in order to be better able to balance their working lives with the demands of parenthood.

A recent study conducted in an EU MS explored the possibility of replacing the existing maternity leave system with a system of combined parental leave for both parents, designed to give fathers the possibility to be more involved in their children's early weeks of life. The total amount of leave available under the system studied was 26 weeks, which is in line with the current EU average. No change was made to the minimum length of paid maternity leave (16 weeks), but, in recognition of the increasingly acknowledged importance of shared parenting, both parents had the option of sharing 10 further weeks of flexible, half-paid leave between them however they wanted.

Stephen Katts

Published: 12.02.20XX

EMPLOYEE RIGHTS

Equal Opportunities

Many people struggle to find a job that suits them. Employed people often find it difficult to juggle their professional and family lives. With the EU having proposed many actions in this area, we take a look at the current state of the EU workforce.

Parents (and particularly first-time parents) are often suddenly confronted with the difficulties of combining their family responsibilities with their work commitments. A survey reveals that parents transition back to work more smoothly if they feel that they have been able to spend as much time with their newborn baby as they needed to. Many mothers are eager to pursue their career goals and often feel the need to return to work before their standard period of maternity leave ends. However, with waiting lists for childcare services currently so long throughout the EU, these women frequently find it difficult to arrange suitable care for their children. This puts them at a disadvantage, since parents who take full-length parental leave have more time to register for such services.

A representative of parental rights organisation PARINT argues that while there have been 'many improvements in terms of the rights of parents, these have focused mainly on one standard type of regular parental leave, which many people feel is rather restrictive'.

Women still face difficulties in terms of general employment opportunities. One of our readers, 43-year-old Pat B., says that she has "been looking intensively for a new job" and that she is now becoming "very frustrated with the lack of opportunities for someone with a secondary school diploma". This underlines a distinct trend. While most female post-secondary-level degree holders over the age of 40 work in a high-level position, less well-educated women in this age group have much more difficulty climbing the corporate ladder or finding a suitable new job.

On the other hand, many highly educated women report that they had difficulty finding their first job at the start of their careers; they claim to receive fewer opportunities during selection processes than male candidates.

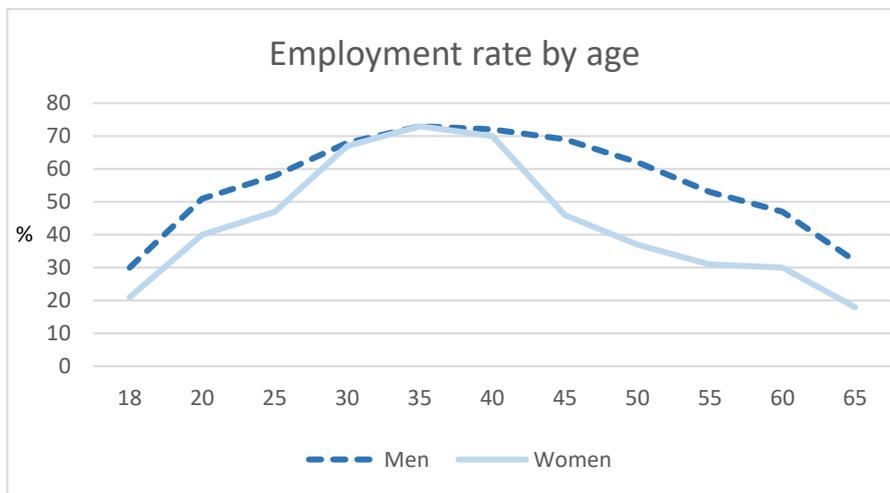


20/04/20XX

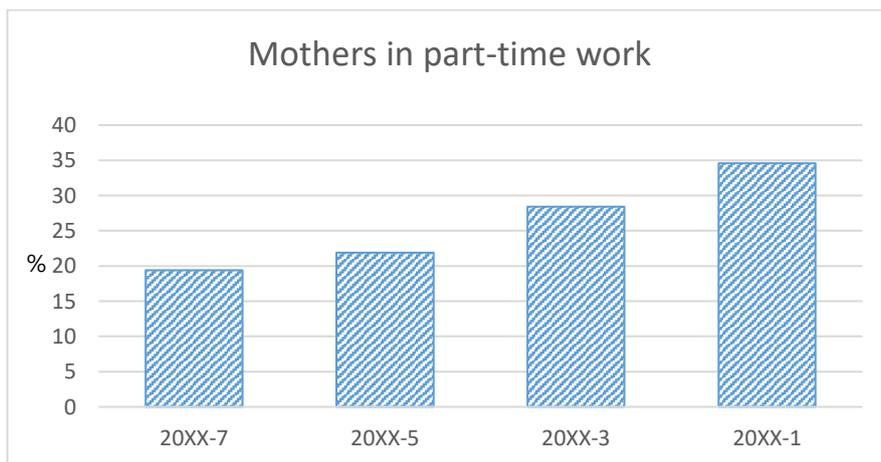
Review of figures from the EU’s statistical office related to the current ES

The average employment rate across the EU is currently 60.4 %: the figure for men is currently 62.4 %, while the average employment rate for women has increased from 51.4 % in 20XX-4 to the present level of 57.8 %.

[...]



[...]



Percentage of mothers (children < 10 years old) who work part time



WGRES Meeting No 4

Suggestions for the new ES (excerpt):

- Lessons learned from the current ES
 - Provision of childcare services across the EU has increased over the last couple of years, and has become much more affordable and higher in quality than ever before.

- Notes for the next ES
 - Under the current EU law, MS must ensure a minimum of 16 weeks of paid maternity leave. It should, however, be borne in mind that all other decisions relating to the actual application of and conditions for their individual parental-leave systems are made by the MS themselves.

NEW INITIATIVES TO MAXIMISE OPPORTUNITIES

In this report we present the findings from our most recent annual analysis of the European labour market.

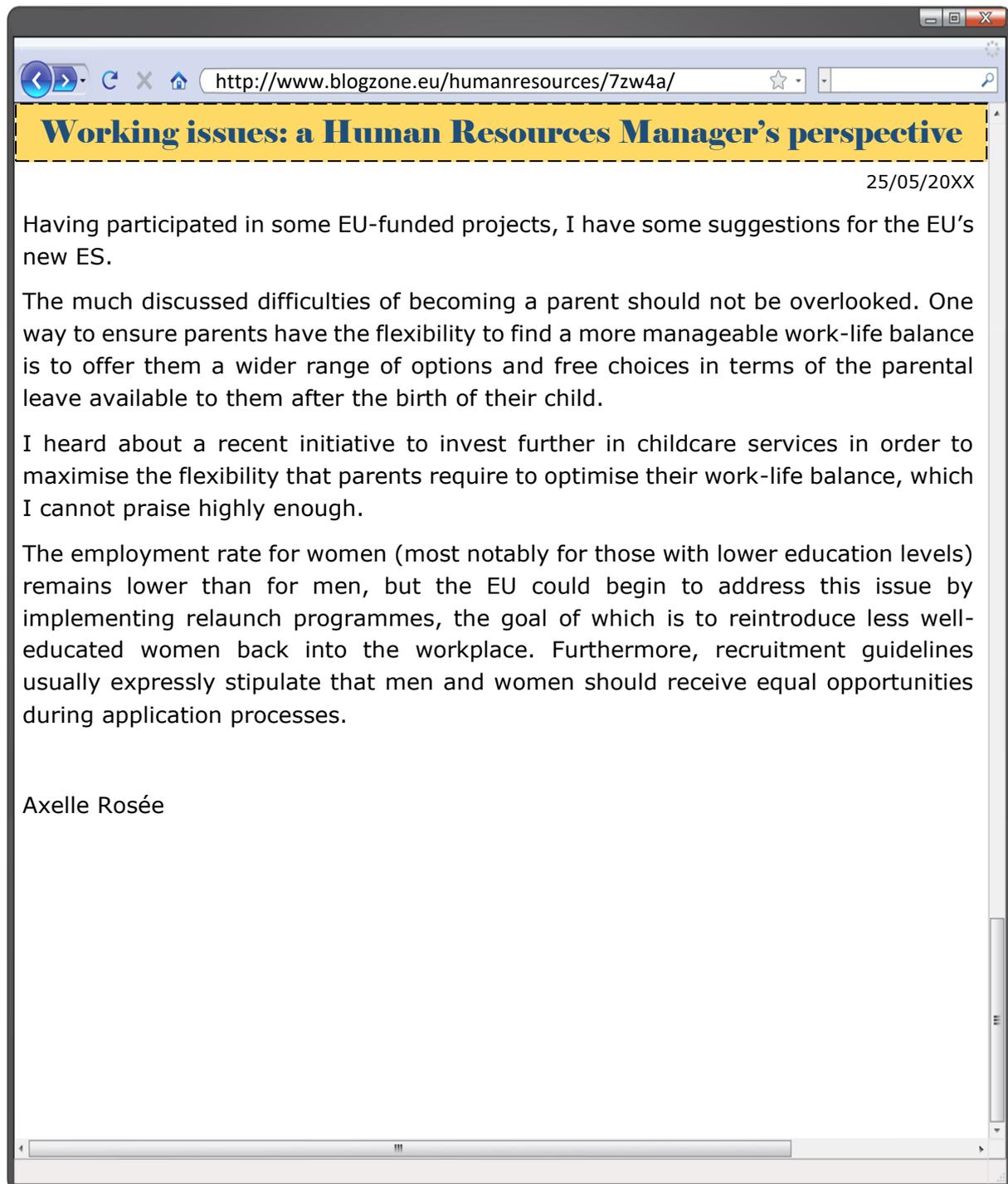
[...]

Statistics show that a significant number of parents feel that there are still too many limitations on their freedom to choose when to return to work after the birth of a child. In particular, mothers who would prefer to go back to work before the end of the standard maternity leave receive little support and therefore feel somewhat disadvantaged. One way to give households more flexibility to find a better work-life balance would be to ensure greater availability and accessibility of affordable, high quality childcare facilities. Another is to assure parents that they will be equally well supported whether they decide to use up their entire parental leave or to go back to work early; for example, the existing childcare infrastructure should have the capacity to cater for the childcare needs of any parent who chooses to return to work before their official period of leave ends.

[...]

According to our 20XX research, the employment rate for women over 40 who did not acquire a secondary school certificate is just 42 %.

[...]



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar containing the URL <http://www.blogzone.eu/humanresources/7zw4a/>. The page title is "Working issues: a Human Resources Manager's perspective" and the date is "25/05/20XX". The main content of the page is a text-based article discussing EU-funded projects and work-life balance issues.

Working issues: a Human Resources Manager's perspective

25/05/20XX

Having participated in some EU-funded projects, I have some suggestions for the EU's new ES.

The much discussed difficulties of becoming a parent should not be overlooked. One way to ensure parents have the flexibility to find a more manageable work-life balance is to offer them a wider range of options and free choices in terms of the parental leave available to them after the birth of their child.

I heard about a recent initiative to invest further in childcare services in order to maximise the flexibility that parents require to optimise their work-life balance, which I cannot praise highly enough.

The employment rate for women (most notably for those with lower education levels) remains lower than for men, but the EU could begin to address this issue by implementing relaunch programmes, the goal of which is to reintroduce less well-educated women back into the workplace. Furthermore, recruitment guidelines usually expressly stipulate that men and women should receive equal opportunities during application processes.

Axelle Rosée

Subject: Options for parents

Since recently becoming a father, I have been looking into the available options to help me combine my family commitments with work. I read a study on parental leave, which attempted to measure the effects of introducing wider choices and greater flexibility (i.e. more varied leave and pay options) into parents' working arrangements. Under the system studied, 10 weeks of partially paid leave (in addition to the mother's guaranteed 16) could be divided between both parents any way they wanted. The reasoning behind this — i.e. that a child's parents should be free to make the arrangements that best suit their family's needs — is something I fully agree with. Does anyone know if or when such a system might actually be introduced?

Posted by Nick C. on 01/03/20XX

While I do support the ideas behind this, we must be realistic: in order to introduce a system under which parents would receive half their normal pay for any of these 10 extra weeks they took, tough decisions would first be needed on how much this should cost and who should pay for it. In all honesty, I think such an option would be too complex. Instead, greater effort should be made to promote careers in childcare. I have noticed that not many people know about the many professional childcare courses that are currently available. People should be made more aware that it is possible for them to switch to working in childcare at any stage of their working life.

Posted by Veronica E. on 03/03/20XX

Subject: Relaunch programmes

I recently heard something about 'relaunch' programmes, which allow people to learn the relevant skills in a field, which can then help them to secure a permanent position within an organisation or at least to become better equipped for the current job market. Does anyone know any more about this?

Posted by Alice C. on 05/04/20XX

I have some doubts about such programmes; interns cannot be asked to work for free, since they often have families to support.

Posted by Eric C. on 12/04/20XX



20/10/20XX-1

Internal Report on ES implementation in the MS

This report examines various improvements to employment and the workforce that have been made in the different MS under the ES.

Employment rates:

- Detailed results reveal that there are still large differences in employment rates across the MS. The greatest employment rate increases have been achieved by the larger MS; however, it should be noted that, given their sizeable populations, these MS have a greater influence on the overall statistics and their positive results may be masking problems in smaller MS.
- Some smaller MS are still so far away from reaching the overall employment target that 60 % now seems an unrealistic and unachievable goal; perhaps the bar should be lowered for them.

Parental leave:

- It should be noted that all final decisions regarding parental leave ultimately rest with the individual MS, which means that it is highly unrealistic to expect — and practically impossible to ensure — that any actions arising from recommendations made under the ES will be implemented consistently across the entire EU.

Email

From: Roisin Orbo, Social Affairs & Inclusion Unit, Directorate General for Employment
To: Max Weinberg, Working Group Chair, WGRES
Date: 10/05/20XX
Subject: Issues to address in the new ES

Dear Max,

I would like to share some thoughts on the new ES.

Online, many voices are heralding relaunch programmes as a way to engage individuals who have had a lower-level education. However, I do not believe that such initiatives are realistic, given that many companies will be unhappy about having to pay people whose skills are still rather limited while they are still training them to do the job.

Equal opportunities are always important, right from the start of someone's career. I personally feel that the first phase of selection procedures for junior positions in public organisations should be held separately for men and women (but using the same parameters). This would ensure that an equal number of top male and top female applicants proceeded to the next round, thereby guaranteeing equal opportunities for women.

Many parents would be enthusiastic about adopting a new parental-leave system such as that trialled in a recent study. However, this study clearly pointed out the many difficulties involved in implementing such a system, particularly on a large scale. Because each individual MS is responsible for its own system, the EU would face many legislative obstacles if it attempted to introduce a harmonised parental-leave system for all MS.

Additionally, I feel that a well worked-out system of childcare services should benefit both parents and should give the two of them the option to balance their work-life arrangements in a way that fits their specific family situation, i.e. by giving them the flexibility to choose whether to spend more time at home or to return to work. I also feel that certain parents could be given a guarantee that a place with a local childcare service will be held for their child, for example, single parents. They are a particularly vulnerable subgroup because they cannot rely on a partner for help. Otherwise they would need more time to be able to make suitable childcare arrangements etc. before going back to work.

Kind regards,

Roisin

Email

From: Chris Aysech, Member, WGRES
To: Max Weinberg, Working Group Chair, WGRES
Date: 03/06/20XX
Subject: Recommendations for next meeting

Dear Max,

As I will be unable to attend our next working group meeting, could you follow up these issues on my behalf?

Firstly, having reviewed several reports and surveys on working parents, I can say that some of the issues they have are now clearer to me. The main difficulty people face is obtaining a place for their children with the local childcare service. Extremely long waiting times and limited places mean that parents can never be sure of finding suitable childcare for their babies, even if they register with a service a year in advance. This problem is even greater for parents who choose to return to work before their period of leave officially ends.

On another note, the latest EU statistics indicate that female employment has increased to the point where it is now at the level required to help the EU achieve its overall employment target of 60 %. We can be proud of the actions taken in this area, and I would argue that they no longer require close attention, as we are well on the way to achieving this priority goal.

Kind regards,

Chris