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Equal Opportunities and Achieving a Work-Life Balance at the WZB Social Science Center

Employers who aim to promote equal opportunities and a family-friendly work environment need to provide good working conditions for everyone. The WZB realized early on how important it is for all employees to benefit from **equal opportunities and family-friendly working conditions** – and that this in turn can generate a competitive advantage in personnel recruitment. Questions of equal opportunities as well as family-friendly standards form part of a good personnel policy. They are reflected in the **strategic goals**, as set out in the **program budget of the WZB, and their structural implementation**, for instance in the areas of academic career development, the creation of a uniform personnel development concept, equal opportunities, family-friendly working conditions, and the establishment of flexible target quota for equality between men and women according to the cascade model.¹

Equal Opportunities and Achieving a Work-Life Balance in All Processes and Procedures

The WZB takes a holistic approach to ensuring equal opportunities and the possibility of achieving a work-life balance. Far from being considered “special issues,” these topics form an integral part of processes and procedures that affect employees. In practice, the WZB has a good track record of anchoring equal opportunities and a work-life balance in all documents that set out processes and procedures, as well as including cross-references where necessary.

¹ The definition of the cascade model of the German Research Foundation (DFG, Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft): “It sets out targets for the proportion of women at each career level based on the proportion of women at the next lowest level.”
https://www.dfg.de/en/research_funding/principles_dfg_funding/equal_opportunities/research_oriented/index.html

1. Company Agreement on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Working in Research and Infrastructure at the WZB

The **Company Agreement on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Working in Research and Infrastructure at the WZB** lays the foundation for implementing the WZB's strategic goals. Among other sections, it prohibits direct or indirect discrimination and sets out a duty to achieve equal opportunity on all levels, as well as a commitment to eradicating the remaining hurdles facing women in particular.

However, the Agreement is also formulated in such a way as to allow for potential discrimination against men, as well as the underrepresentation of men in certain groups of employees, to be highlighted and for measures to be taken to combat this. Instruments are developed to help carry out this duty to ensure equal opportunity. These include, for example:

- Developing and putting in place measures for forward-thinking and targeted staff development.
- Creating working conditions that foster the eradication of unfair or discriminatory situations in everyday working life and in how work is organized.
- Evaluating performance in a discrimination-free manner, as far as legally and practically possible.
- Increasing the proportion of women working in specific groups in which they are underrepresented.

The full-time **role of the Equal Opportunities Commissioner**, which was created in 2001, reflects these goals. The Commissioner is involved in all HR-related, organizational, and social procedures, takes part in all appointment and employment procedures, council meetings, and thematic working groups. Furthermore, the Commissioner can set particular areas of focus in her work and can create her own initiatives.

As of the end of 2018, just under 50% of employees working in research at the WZB were women. The WZB has a female president and a female managing director. The only area not to have achieved its target quota of 40% – as per the Gemeinsame Wirtschaftskonferenz's cascade model – is the leadership level of the research units.

2. Code of Conduct for a Family-Friendly WZB

The **Code of Conduct** lies at the heart of the **WZB's family-friendly policy**. It was developed as part of the audit berufundfamilie, which has been awarded to the WZB since 2010. It contains nine fundamental principles to which the management and directors of the WZB are unreservedly committed:

1. At the WZB, men and women receive equal support.
2. Balancing work and family life is a special concern.
3. The WZB welcomes staff with children. They are supported through suitable measures. The same applies to staff with caregiving responsibilities.
4. Staff members may not be disadvantaged because of their family circumstances. This applies to new hires and appointments as well as to existing work contracts. When assessing staff performance, the WZB puts special emphasis on the quality of the work produced; all assessments should include an appraisal of the employee's potential regarding their future performance.
5. In the WZB work units, situations of the same nature arising from family circumstances are treated in the same way.
6. Discriminating statements, for instance about or in front of staff with family responsibilities, will not be tolerated.
7. Internal events (lectures, seminars, meetings, etc.) take place between 9.30 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. (core hours). When scheduling events at different hours, all participants should agree on the timing.
8. Childcare services are provided during evening events and conferences.
9. When balancing work and family life, transparency and predictability are key factors. This is especially important for staff working on fixed-term contracts according to the Act on Academic Fixed-Term Contracts (WissZeitVG). Transparency and predictability are also key factors for research-supporting staff working on fixed-term contracts according to the Act on Part-time Work and fixed-term contracts (TZBefrG). In cases of maternal-, parental- or caregiver leave it will be checked whether it is possible to extend the duration of the contract or to convert it into an unlimited contract if the employee applies for it.

3. Support Services

In order to ensure the **compatibility of work and private life**, the WZB supports its staff as far as legally possible in terms of childcare and care for family members who are in need. Needless to say, the WZB's family-friendly work conditions, both in research and support areas, apply to both male and female employees.

The WZB's partnership with pme Familienservice is an important part of this support. Pme Familienservice is a professional service provider that works all over Germany. It offers guidance and active help in searching for and connecting with care services for children and the elderly, as well as offering household services tailored to employees' individual professional and private needs, and offering advice on finding solutions to problems.

If there is a sudden and urgent need for childcare, employees can request emergency childcare via the Familienservice, the costs of which are to be covered by the employee. There are also two backup daycare centers near to the

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WZB, which can be used by employees who urgently need childcare at short notice.

If it is not possible to get a daycare place near to the employee's home at short notice, WZB employees can access a reserved spot at a daycare center near to the WZB. If it is available, this spot can also be used by guest researchers who are accompanied by their family.

In addition, the WZB offers flexible working hours, help for dual career couples, a parent-and-child office, as well as childcare during larger conferences and central evening events. The WZB expressly encourages fathers to make use of their right to paternity leave.²

The fact that the WZB offers childcare during evening events and conferences has been positively noted on social media with several tweets on the topic:



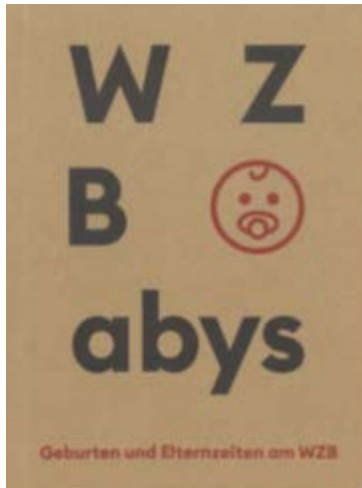
A nice welcome gift: When WZB employees welcome a new member of the family, they are congratulated by the President and receive a **Babygro** and detailed information on the support to which they are entitled.

Parent-and-child office

The parent-and-child office is frequently used by WZB staff. In the last three years, it was used between 30 and 100 times by employees who brought their child to work and do not have their own office. When the WZB hosts evening events and conferences, the parent-and-child office often serves as a childcare facility.

² See <https://www.wzb.eu/en/service-and-administration/work-and-family/wzb-management-on-balancing-work-and-family-life-at-the-wzb> and https://www.wzb.eu/system/files/docs/ende/zeng/flyer_balancing_work_and_family_life_extern_2017-08-23_net.pdf.

WZBabys



The WZBabys brochure details births and parental leave at the WZB. It features a short academic introduction to the topic, before offering an overview of the measures taken to support a successful work-life balance. It also includes feedback from both inside and outside the WZB.

Presentation of Support Measures on the Intranet

All measures to support employees' work-life balance are presented on the intranet, both highlighted when particularly relevant and as a weekly "Question of the Week."

One example of how this information can be presented **when specific situations** arise is illustrated below: The situation is the "classic" problem of childcare suddenly falling through:

- If you participate in the flexible working hours scheme, you can reach out to your supervisor to arrange to **work from home** on individual days (See the Company Agreement on Working Hours).
- If you participate in the flexible working hours scheme, you can reach out to your supervisor to arrange to take up to 16 days of **comp time** during the payroll period. (See the Company Agreement on Working Hours).
- You can bring your child to work and use the **parent-and-child office**; the key can be obtained from the front desk.
- You can take your child to a **backup daycare center** offered by pme Familienservice, as part of the WZB's contract with pme Familienservice. Your child can also **stay the night** there, if you will be **travelling for work** and cannot arrange private childcare.
- You can **organize for an "emergency mother"** from pme Familienservice to **come to your home**. It is your responsibility to cover the costs of this.

Example: Question of the Week

The intranet front page features a question about the parent-and-child office and changing table for one week. Clicking on the question reveals the answer. A new question is displayed each week.

Where can I find the parent-and-child office and a changing table?

The parent-and-child office can be found in Building Section D, Room 026. The key can be obtained from the front desk. The room has a fully equipped computer workstation and there is a printer-copier just across the corridor. The office also features toys, a sofa that can also be used for breastfeeding, a child's travel bed, a bottle warmer, etc. A fold-down changing table can be found...

4. Guidelines for good leadership in research support

Staff in **leadership positions** play a crucial role in making equal opportunities and work-life balance work in practice.

The heads of the research-support areas have agreed upon guiding principles for their areas of responsibility, which are enshrined in the **Guidelines for Good Leadership in Research Support**. This sets out information about strategy, goals, results, role conceptions, value orientation, communication, skill development, teamwork, delegation, feedback, motivation, team development, and conflict regulation. **Point 9, Diversity and Complementarity**, states a commitment to diversity and complementarity: "We respect differences in values, outlooks, and personal circumstances. Within our teams, we encourage a climate of mutual respect, trust, and teamwork, in order to ensure the compatibility of institutional and private interests."

5. Guidelines on Staff Recruitment and Induction

The process for attracting new staff members and getting them started at the WZB is explained in detail in the **Guidelines on Staff Recruitment and Induction**. The guidelines aim to offer support during recruitment, to ensure that the entire process is characterized by quality and professionalism, and to create a friendly atmosphere during the selection procedure. The guidelines frequently cross-reference central WZB documents relating to equal opportunities and work-life balance.

The following factors are central to any successful recruitment process:

- **Planning the process in coordination with everyone involved:** What is key here is to have a detailed overview of the responsibilities of everyone involved, including the Equal Opportunities Commissioner and the Works Council, throughout the entire process. When setting the details of the position, one task that particularly applies to research positions is to manage the contract length in line with the guidelines on career development for PhD students and postdocs, as well as the Family-Friendly WZB Code of Conduct. These set out in detail the regulations on fixed-term contracts for research positions funded by core or third-party funds. Permanent positions in research support areas should be advertised as such with a built-in trial period to allow for evaluation.
- **Creating a skills profile for the open position:** When creating a skills profile, it is important to take care to avoid discrimination. The WZB is extremely committed to its goal of rooting out discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, gender, religion or worldview, disability, age, or sexual identity. This is not only proof of the WZB explicitly acknowledging its social responsibility: it also fulfils the legal requirements as set out by the General Equal Treatment Act (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, AGG). Furthermore, the WZB's Company Agreement on Equal Opportunities sets out the objective to foster equal opportunities between women and men.
- **Writing and publicizing the job advertisement:** The job advertisement is built around the skills profile and concrete points of information that are set at the beginning. As a matter of principle, gender-neutral language is to be used when jobs are advertised.
- **Planning and structuring the selection process:** During the selection processes, the chair is advised by a representative of the Works Council, the Equal Opportunities Commissioner, and the Severe Disability Representative. All four make up the selection board and can influence

the selection of the successful candidate by exercising their right to view all documents and, if they so choose, to suggest which candidates should be invited to interview. Documents may only be evaluated according to the criteria set out in the job advertisement.

- **Examples for systematic judgement errors:** During the evaluation of applicants or employees or even of application documents, the evaluators often fall into systematic errors based on distorted perception (I), measurement problems (II), or different (gender-specific) performances of the applicant's competences (III). A more detailed description of the systematic errors mentioned can be found in the appendix. Before any judgment is made, it is a good idea to reflect on possible judgement errors and gender-specific performances in order to avoid making these errors.
- **Coming to a selection decision:** Interviews are structured in order to allow for better comparison between candidates. Before the interview, the skills profile is used to create guiding themes that will provide a framework for the interview. Some questions are inadmissible in interviews according to the right to personal freedom guaranteed by the German Basic Law (Art. 2(1) of the Basic Law in conjunction with Art. 1(1) of the Basic Law). In addition, discrimination is forbidden by the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG), and discrimination against severely disabled candidates is expressly forbidden by the Social Code IX (Sozialgesetzbuch IX, § 81(2) SGB IX).

The end of the interview is an opportunity to mention how the WZB seeks to support staff in, for example, achieving a balance between work and family life.

In the majority of cases, the selection panel reaches a consensus on the decision to appoint a particular candidate. If, however, the Works Council Representative, the Severe Disability Representative, or the Equal Opportunities Commissioner does not agree with the decision, the relevant rules for managing conflict apply.

The last chapters of the guidelines describe how communication with applicants should take place and how new colleagues should be integrated into everyday working life at the WZB.

6. Guidelines for Supporting the Careers of PhD Students and Postdocs

The guidelines for supporting the careers of PhD students and postdocs explicitly cross-reference the *Company Agreement on Equal Opportunities* and the *Code of Conduct for a Family-Friendly WZB*. It also contains a guide to procedures and sets out concrete measures.

As part of creating good working conditions, contracts and scholarships that are not subject to social security contributions should only be awarded in exceptional circumstances. In order to aid employees in planning their career development, core-funded contracts should be drawn up for a minimum period of three years. The possibilities of the Act on Academic Fixed-Term Contracts (*Wissenschaftszeitvertragsgesetz*) should be exhausted: This means that contracts should be drawn up according to individual circumstances for a period of up to six years, with an additional two years for every child. For third-party funded positions, contracts should cover the timeframe of the entire project. Furthermore, when applying for third-party funding, funds should also be requested to cover the costs of extending the contract during maternity, paternity, or caregiver leave, as long as this is appropriate to the project in question. There is also a structured internal procedure to assess individual cases to see which circumstances apply on a contractual level to maternity, paternity, and caregiver leave in third-party-funded projects.

Indefinite contract extensions are viewed as an appropriate instrument for ensuring employees can properly plan their work and family life. There is a limited scope for these extensions according to the guidelines and procedures relating to transitioning academic staff at the WZB from fixed-term to permanent contracts.

When employees conduct periods of research abroad, the WZB guarantees a contribution to the cost of childcare for children up to (but not including) seven years of age, where evidence is supplied by the employee. The amount contributed is capped at the maximum level applicable to the length of stay, according to the German Travel Expenses Act (*Bundesreisekostengesetz*).

7. Company Agreement on Personnel and Skill Development

The **Company Agreement on Personnel and Skill Development** is part of staff development at the WZB and serves to promote skill development among all WZB employees. In doing so, the Agreement also contributes to supporting professional equal opportunities for women and men; in fact, this is explicitly stated in the preamble.

Taking a look at the Agreement, it is clear that funding for participating in further training also covers childcare that might be needed, as per the latest advice of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, and

Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend). This applies to both academic training, for example participating in conferences, and non-academic training for research-support staff.

8. Transitioning Research Contracts from Fixed-Term to Permanent

The procedures and processes relating to transitioning academic staff from fixed-term to permanent contracts (mentioned in the career guidelines) also contain an Equal Opportunities element when it comes to new contract extensions. In order to avoid discriminatory behavior, two of every five new contract extensions must be awarded to research staff. This guarantees a proportion of 40%. The Equal Opportunities Commissioner and the Works Council Representative – alongside the Severe Disability Representative, if applicable – have an advisory function in the contract extension process.

9. Company Agreement on Working Time

The **Company Agreement on Working Time** applies to all employees, with few exceptions. It contains various regulations that allow staff to be flexible about where and when they work, in order to help them balance their professional and private commitments.

Within any given payroll period, a full-time employee may be up to 40 hours in credit or in debt; for part-time positions, this number is lower. In urgent family situations, for example if a child or relative in need of care needs to see a doctor, hours in credit can also be used within the WZB's core hours, with the agreement with the employee's direct supervisor. Comp time can be taken on up to 16 days per year if this is discussed with the direct supervisor. Employees are also entitled to work from home on individual days (hence they are free from mandatory attendance at the WZB), again, with the agreement of the direct supervisor. The possibility of working from home is not just of benefit to staff with family responsibilities. This flexible arrangement can also be of help in other situations, for example if a tradesperson is scheduled to arrive and an employee has to wait for him or her.

Employees can build up time owed in order to cover longer leaves of absence of up to six months, as long as this is agreed to by the employee's department and a contractual regulation is drawn up to cover the period in which the employee is building up hours.

10. Handbook for Annual Staff Appraisal Meeting

Each member of staff faces individual challenges in balancing work and home life, and these challenges can change over time. The **Handbook for Annual Staff Appraisal Meetings** contains guidelines for what could be asked and discussed during the meeting, which also specifically address the topic of creating a

work-life balance. The Handbook is designed to spark engagement with this question encourage reflection on it before the meeting, so that staff come prepared and can get the most out of the discussion. Including these topics in the guidelines means that enough time and space can be dedicated to them during the appraisal meeting between employee and supervisor. The guidelines are another example of the WZB's holistic approach to equal opportunities and ensuring the compatibility of work and home life.

Holistic Approach and Positive Presence

The WZB conceives of equal opportunities and a family-friendly work environment as part of its commitment to creating a workplace from which everyone can benefit. The WZB takes a holistic approach to ensuring equal opportunities and the compatibility of work and home life. Far from being “special issues,” these topics form an integral part of procedures, routines, and processes at the WZB.

This paper provides a summary of the central measures and regulations that have been put in place to make the WZB a fair working environment. It primarily draws on the following documents, which include specific elements relating to equal opportunities and/or the compatibility of work and home life. In some cases, these measures are illustrated with explanatory examples:

- Company Agreement on Equal Opportunities
- Company Agreement on Working Time, including the possibility of longer periods of leave
- Company Agreement on Personnel and Skill Development
- Code of Conduct Family-Friendly WZB
- Guidelines for Supporting the Careers of PhD Students and Postdocs
- Guidelines for Best Practice Leadership in Research-Support Areas
- Guidebook for Hiring New Staff
- Guidelines for Transitioning from Fixed-Term to Permanent Contracts
- Handbook for Annual Staff Appraisal Meetings.

In addition, the WZB's own research integrates “gender” as a category for analysis. The WZB library has a database of research documentation, where diverse publications detailing similar results from research can be found.

The measures described here create a framework for making the WZB a truly family-friendly workplace where equal opportunity is guaranteed. They reflect the importance of these issues for the WZB. When the occasion arises, specific measures to support a work-life balance are highlighted and remain present when they are featured as Questions of the Week. These topics garner even

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more positive attention through initiatives like the WZB Babygro, the availability of the parent-and-child office, and the WZBabys brochure, which was recently compiled and published internally.