

ALT EMPORDÀ COUNTY COUNCIL



PROM

European Project

**REPORT ON THE PARTICIPATORY FORUMS WITH WOMEN AND
EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted during the months of June, September and October 2007 at the headquarters of the Alt Empordà County Council (CCAÉ), following the methodology proposed by the CIR. The study contained two parts. In the first, seven women with different sociological profiles were interviewed, and a participatory forum was held with all of them. In the second part, nine “experts” from different areas within the field of education were interviewed, and a participatory forum was held with four of them.

The goals of the PROM project, “Promoting the role of women locally, institutionally and economically”, are to first analyse how the role of women is being promoted in cities, thus changing the gender stereotypes, and secondly, how to get women, men, companies and schools involved in balancing work and family life. This report is organised into two parts. The first part analyses different women’s visions of balancing work and family life from a variety of angles: the role of women in the household and family setting, their problems and strategies to balance work and family, and policies that could be developed in order to improve this balance. The second part compiles the perceptions of experts in the field of education. It is divided into: the perception of the problems brought about by trying to balance work and family, the contribution of schools and free-time activities, and finally, an assessment of the current situation and proposals for improvement.

With regard to the **sample of women**, they are all mothers, but we took three main criteria into account in order to ensure the heterogeneity of the sample:

- Representative of social echelons: origin, age (large groups) and social class (as defined through their work status and income).
- Representative of different family situation: single, married and divorced women with or without small children/teenagers and dependent family members.

- Representative of the different labour sectors: public, private enterprise and third sector.

Some of the **characteristics of the profile of the seven women interviewed** are: Four of them have a nuclear family and work full time, two in the public sphere (one as a civil servant and the other as a freelancer), a third works as an executive in private enterprise, while the fourth is in the process of re-entering the working world after having a child. The other two women interviewed have single-parent nuclear families (one is divorced and the other has no partner) with small and/or adolescent children. One is a business woman and manager of a foundation, while the other is a civil and servant and local politician. A woman from a Moroccan background was also interviewed, as Moroccans are highly representative of Spain's new multicultural reality.

With regard to the **profiles of the experts in the field of education**, we sought a representative from all the different stakeholders involved. From the schools, we interviewed a headmaster, a secondary school teacher and a Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) member. From the area of free-time activities, members of sports and hiking groups participated, as have workers from an extracurricular activity centre. And from the field of politics, a childhood expert and the councillor of education from the local government were interviewed.

Finally, the **appendixes** contain the documents used in the research. Appendix 1 and 2 refer to the study involving the women, and they specifically include the scripts for the interviews and the participatory forum. Appendixes 3 and 4 contain the scripts for the research with experts in the field of education. The transcriptions of the field work in both phases of the study are contained in a separate, more confidential document.

2. THE LOCAL CONTEXT

In 2006 the population of the Alt Empordà county was 123,900 inhabitants.¹ Thirty percent of the population lives in the capital, Figueres, while the remainder lives in small villages (between 200 and 4,000 inhabitants) which are mainly devoted to tourism on the coast and agriculture inland. The county has a high average income which is above the average in Catalonia, and more than 20% of the population immigrants, although many of them come from the European Union.

In 2001, there was a child under the age of 16 living in almost 27% of the households, and 16% of them were single-parent households. This figure has doubled in less than ten years, as in 1991 only 7.7% of the households were run by a single parent. At the same time, more than 34% of the households have a person over the age of 65, and 10% have someone over the age of 80. These figures are still on the rise, in line with the trend towards a longer life expectancy and lower birth rates.

The main law in the realm of balancing work and family life in Spain is the 1999 Law on Work-Family Balance, which was recently superseded by the Law on Effective Equality between Men and Women (2007) and the Law on Promoting Autonomy and Care of Dependent Persons (2006). As for Catalonia, the current regulatory framework is the law on "Support for Families" (2003).

Finally, with regard to the division of household chores, in **15%** of the families the woman alone is in charge of household chores and the family, and this figure falls only slightly (to **13%**) when the women are working in the labour market. Generally speaking, **9.7%** of the families split the household and family

¹ Source: Statistical Institute of Catalonia. Data available at www.idescat.net

chores equally, while the highest percentages are found in the cases young couples (**21%**) and couples with higher education (**16%**).²

² SÁNCHEZ, C; LLÀCER, H; (2005) "El repartiment del treball domèstic i familiar" in Estructura Social i Desigualtats a Catalunya Volume I. Jaume Bofill Foundation.

II. PART ONE: RESULTS OF THE PARTICIPATORY FORUMS WITH WOMEN

1. PERCEPTIONS ON THE CURRENT ROLE OF MOTHERS AND FATHERS

Women's general perception is that the **traditional gender roles have not undergone a radical change**, rather they have experienced a very limited change which are described as **superficial social changes**. The fact that women have massively joined the workforce has not truly led to changes on the household front.

"I think the most common situation is for the woman to still bear the brunt of household work even if they work outside the home. The workload is equal on the job but not at home."

"The roles in our society have changed, but I think that they are still very superficial changes, on the outside. Really, the role of working women, mothers and household chores still holds true in the family. Mothers play a more important role than fathers at home."

Specifically, they believe that **women** still bear the **brunt of the burden in the family decision-making and organisation**, and that even though men participate more in family life, we are still far from equality on this front.

"Nowadays, we have achieved significant changes in the roles of fathers and mothers, but we still have a long way to go to reach true equality in bringing up children and doing household chores. The main changes, in my point of view, are that now men at least understand that they have to help out, and many of them do. But the brunt of the responsibility is still on the mothers, although it is true that there are men who are fully involved."

Society itself is changing, but **certain responsibilities are still identified with the role of mothers**. Our interviewees did not believe that these gender roles have been overcome, and one woman gave several examples.

"Socially, by the input that reaches you from society, I see that there is a preponderance of women; the teachers ask the mothers to come, and the facilities to balance work and family are used by women."

The women themselves acknowledged that these are **highly internalised cultural roles**, and they admit their own **responsibility** in upholding and

reproducing them. In some cases, several women even expressed a sense of **self-blame** for not doing enough as women to reach equality both inside and outside the home.

"I think that there are still different roles and stereotype. Even though there is a trend towards equality, it will be hard. Because "we want to but it hurts", that is, we want to eliminate them but at the same time without even realising it we're tormenting ourselves, we're not doing enough."

"I admit that sometimes I put up my own handicaps, "what will they say" when I ask for a leave."

One of the women spoke about how society **blames working women** for the **negative changes in children's upbringing**. The social pressure exerted on women to play different roles is still quite strong. Many women have double workdays: as mother and as worker.

"Women have gone out into the working world, family and societal models have changed, and we have reached a situation in which the children no longer have a referent and a space where they move comfortably. I am concerned that this is basically attributed to the fact that women have gone out into the working world. That's not fair; this has changed, but so have many other things. I don't think about it directly, but someone could end up feeling guilty for this situation. It is hard to keep playing all the roles."

In any event, even though they perceived these social changes as limited, two of the women interviewed claimed that their **own personal experience is one of total equality in the household chores and care-giving**. It is no coincidence that these were two young women with a high level of education, one a freelancer and the other an executive, the population swaths in which the equitable division of family chores reaches the highest percentages.

"We split everything, both household chores and taking care of the children. We both end up doing everything."

1.1. FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE CHANGE IN MINDSET

There are several factors that influence men's and women's visions of their roles in the family sphere, that is, their mindset with regard to the tentative changes in the roles underway.

- **People's age** determines whether or not they have experienced an educational system that does not discriminate between men and

women and policies that aim for a certain degree of gender equality. This is found in different generations, yet also within a single family, between sisters.

"Looking between one generation and the other, there have been many changes. I have older sisters, and their model and mine have nothing to do with each other. At the age of 18, they were already married and staying at home. Within the same family there are very different models, for that reason I hope that there will be a change in this generation we are raising."

- At a time of a great cultural mix in the Alt Empordà (21% of the population is immigrants), it is claimed that the **cultural factor** influences the division of roles, so that different paces of change can be seen in different cultures, such as among Muslims. This is viewed by the local women as a chance for women from other cultures to take advantage of these changes if they want, yet they do not feel threatened by the women themselves.

"It's very clearly a matter of culture. We are going at different speeds. We (Spaniards, Europeans) tend to aim at equality, but there are other very respectable cultures that don't, where the roles of men and woman are very clearly demarcated and there should be no interferences."

In any event, it is believed that **changing the traditional gender roles will take several generations** and that to achieve this change, global policies will be needed in several different spheres:

"I think it will be very hard and that 50-50 will not be achieved in our generation. In the next generation it is also unlikely to be achieved, I wish it would! But it will take many generations; I think it's very difficult."

1.2. PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEW FAMILY MODELS

First of all, it should be said that the new family models have **under no circumstances led to a rethinking of motherhood or fatherhood**, in both families with homosexual parents and in reconstituted families. To the women interviewed, it is more a question of adapting to new situations by both mothers and fathers.

"It's not that motherhood is being rethought. I am separated and my view of mothers and fathers has not changed. The children are with me and their father has reproduced his role in another family and continues to do what he used to do at home, but in another family unit."

"It has changed for the better because two men or two women can raise a child equally well; I don't think that children need a mother and a father; they need love, affection and an upbringing. It doesn't matter who gives them this."

Yet at the same time, several issues are further explained:

- Even though there is a positive view of families with homosexual parents, the interviewees recognised that socially there are many **stereotypes to be broken, and it is quite common to find difficulties accepting** these family models.

"One thing is that the family unit has changed, and another is that our ideas have changed. It is a fallacy; there are still difficulties and prejudices, even though what has changed is the support from laws and policies, but in the collective imagination the negative stereotypes persist."

- The degree of acceptance of divorced and/or reconstituted families is much higher today; however, the perceptions and experiences of the women interviewed show that the situations are more **complex** due to the diversity of family roles, and **balancing work and family requires better organisation and a high economic cost** in these types of families.

"Now motherhood is much more complex; it's different. If they are your own children, you can treat them one way, if not you have to be more permissive, you can't treat them the same, the other person has to do more."

2. THE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD CHORES AND CARE-GIVING

The division of household chores and care-giving is one of the main challenges facing couples today. There is a great deal of resistance, yet also rewards. One of the women told how since she went back to work, sharing the household and family chores has improved her relationship with her partner and has been positive for both of them:

"The cooperation with my husband is almost 50%, if not 60%. It was a radical, positive change that was in no way traumatic. He took on more of the chores and he's happy. Plus, he is more involved as a father, although he always liked children a lot. It has its inconveniences, but it's better for our relationship, which has been enriched, not to mention that it's better for me."

2.1. TAKING CARE OF THE CHILDREN

Generally speaking, the women interviewed admitted that there is still an **unequal distribution of the child-rearing by gender**, which is more accentuated when the children are smaller, even though they do not think this is justified.

"When the children are little, the mother is with them more, but that's a fallacy; they should both be there, not just one."

In terms of their own experience, **it depends on each woman's personal and professional plans**. Though not in all cases, the division of the care-giving was different between those who stopped working when their children were born and did not consider going back to work until they were a certain age, and those women who did not stop working or leave their professional careers. In the former, the children are a **central factor in these women's everyday activities**, much more so than for the fathers, and their preponderance in the care and upbringing of their children is absolute, even though deep down they would like a more equitable distribution of the family burdens.

"It should be 50%, but we women appropriate the children more than men do, it interferes with the care that the father gives and we tell them not to put those trousers on them, don't yell at them, don't raise your hand. In my case, I would like it to be 50-50, but I think the children are more mine."

"When the children were little and I worked less with a set timetable, my husband and I had an agreement: I took care more of raising them and him of

playing with them, but when they were aged 13 and 15, I decided to start working."

In the second case are the women who have **maintained their professional career** even though they have children and have been able to share the care of the children 50-50 with their husbands. These are the youngest couples with high levels of education.

"When the children cry the mother usually gets up, but in my case their father got up and it was the most normal thing in the world."

There was also a third type of case, which unfortunately seems to be more widespread, that of women who maintain their **professional career** and at the same time shoulder **more than 50% of the family responsibilities**. In these cases, balancing work and family is even more complicated, and it is common for conflicts to arise in the couple because the women are overburdened.

"Men have made strides in their physical presence in taking care of the children, but my experience is that the women have to organise the children (timetables, ...). The men spend more time than before, but women take on more. It's not 50%; in some cases it is, but not in mine."

2.2. THE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD CHORES

Once again, the interviewees acknowledged the significant **change in the division of roles** that has taken place between the current and previous generations, but with limitations, as men's idea about the division of household chores is that they **"help" more than "share"**.

"The problem is that men have not joined in the household chores; their idea is to help out."

"I think that women tend to play a greater role than men, at least in organising the household (what to buy, what to do, ...) and the responsibility, whereas the men help out."

Even though there is no consensus about when couples will come to split these burdens equitably between both members, whether it will be in the generation being raised now or whether more generations will be needed, the women interviewed mentioned several **conditioning factors** to reach family and household **co-responsibility** one day:

- The need for both **men and women to be re-educated**, as even though the women themselves want to change the status quo, as members of a society with certain values, they themselves unconsciously maintain it.

"It involves re-educating men and women, as we have a lot of the blame because we raise our children reproducing the same system. But I see that within a few generations this will have changed; there is a great deal of difference between my mother and my daughters."

- Along the same lines, they uphold the need for **dialogue** between the two partners in order to **jointly organise the chores**.
- However, this would be much more useful if this were accompanied by **overall awareness-raising campaigns**, as it is ultimately a social problem which goes beyond the families themselves and also involves schools, companies, etc.

"Internally, with good organisation and a great deal of dialogue. Globally, I think that informative advertising campaigns on equally splitting the household chores would be very useful. Having someone outside the family circle give "guidelines" about equality would create more awareness than a thousand daily discussions."

- Finally, it is a **question of the couple's habits**, of the set of norms that couples agree to when they begin living together.

"From the start, it is a question of habits, of how you begin a relationship. If a person begins by taking on all the chores, why does the other have to do any? We complain but we do everything. In his home, my husband never picked up a broom, but if he doesn't pick up the broom at home he has to live with the dirt, or the opposite, I also get lazy."

With regard to the interviewees' **personal experience** in splitting the household chores, it varies according to their work and family situation. The ones who operate with dynamics that involve **splitting the household chores** claimed that these chores were divided equally, yet at the same time they acknowledged that **the initiative was not shared**:

"We women take on more, but even though you have to take the lead, if it's at least split..."

In other cases, the **division is about 60-40%** in favour of the women, and if the women do not work in the labour market they do **90% of the household and family chores** herself.

"Now I don't work, so I do 90% of the household work and childcare. I'm gradually looking for a job, for just a few hours a day so that it won't be such a sudden change for the children. My husband is in charge of the outdoor work, he spends lots of time in the garden, and I do the things inside the home."

Some women have **outside household help** when their professional responsibilities leave them no time to spend on the home and they have no family support network.

One of the woman gave an assessment of how to measure the household chores done by both partners: it is more accurate to **assess** the chores by **how much work they are** rather than the amount of **time** spent on them.

"I don't judge work by time but by the result. Time can fool you. I can do the same thing as my husband in half the time; that's why we talk about the chore. He spends many more hours working at home than I do and ends up doing the same amount of work as I do with the same quality, but he needs more time."

With regard to **conflicts inside the couple** over the division of household chores, the women acknowledge that they are **inevitable** given the way society is organised and the division of roles. There has, however, been headway in how these conflicts are managed through education.

*CC: I would define the status of men in the current situation as one of complacency. The conflict comes when women take on much of the work and they take it for granted as long as they can, but there comes a point when the conflict just bursts forth on its own. Either the other one gives a lot and the efforts are balanced, or conflict arises.
JJ: There's also the other side, us!
AO: There are many factors that come into play: cultural, roles, social... it's not just a battle inside the couple, it comes rooted in a patriarchal family model... but more and more there is an important factor which is upbringing and people's level of education.
CC: I think we've made strides in managing these conflicts; a higher level of education gives us more tools.*

3. PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES IN BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

3.1. THE OBLIGATION TO CHOOSE

Given the way time and roles within current society are organised, many women are forced to choose, sacrificing one part of their life for another. In some cases, they decide to **sacrifice part of their family life to maintain a professional career**, often facing a **lack of understanding from society and a sense of guilt** that this entails for women. In other cases, women **sacrifice their professional life in favour of children**, with the certainty that they are missing opportunities for **self-realisation and personal autonomy, and that rejoining the workforce** will be tricky. In any event, the greatest discrimination is that women are obligated to choose in order to balance work a family, a reality that **men do not face**.

JJ: We have improved on some fronts and gotten worse on others... We have gone out of the home, we are freer, we have more equality... but there are mothers who want to stay at home with their children and mothers who want to work, we have to look at both things.

CC: And give women the option to choose and not have to give up anything.

JJ: To earn the good things we've had to sacrifice others. Men haven't had to deal with this because they come from other roots. They have never considered equality, they don't know what it means, they've never asked for it because they've had it all their lives, but we have to ask for it.

The main problem when balancing work and family life in women with a professional life who reach **positions of authority** is that the social models are clearly **male-oriented**; that is, they do not take the work-family balance into account.

"On a global scale the positions of power are occupied by men. Look at the governments: what percentage of women are represented... in the positions of power there is a great deal of corporatism and to enter this circle the language is masculine, the slang, the customs, the way it works. Notice that when a woman reaches a position of responsibility, the first thing she is asked is to dress like a man, with executive clothing, which is not feminine. There are many other things, timetables, meetings, business dinners and lunches."

Their position as **women** in a traditionally male-dominated realm **prevents them from forcing through changes in the model**. Thus, they **sacrifice aspects of their family and personal lives**, in doing so triggering a sense of

guilt, which in turn makes it more difficult for them to land positions as executives, entrepreneurs or politicians.

"I come upon difficulties because political life takes place outside working hours. The majority of politicians are men, and they have no problem scheduling meetings for 9 or 10 pm. I go at the expense of being with my children, and when my parents can't watch them it's also a cost, plus I worry. Rarely can you manage to change the time because the majority of men don't have family responsibilities since they have their partner or wife to take care of it. Sometimes I think I'm not doing what I should because I leave my children at times when I should be acting as mother. It's very complicated... you have to really want to do it (be in politics). We women can do it, but at the expense of setting aside many things; it comes at a very high cost."

Among the women who left the job market to take care of their children, **it is hard for them to rejoin the workforce** if they want to continue handling all the responsibility for balancing work and family. However, for young women, not re-entering the job market has more dire consequences (social isolation, illness):

"I can't find any jobs that are compatible with my children; I don't need to work for money, but I want to do something more than just my children and home. I am gradually losing all my friends; they all have children but they all work, and my social circle is getting smaller and smaller. Now I can be with my children if they get ill, but when they're 12 I'll be 50 and who's going to hire me then? You have to sacrifice some things but if you don't you'll pay the price in the long term. I can see it with my mother; when we all left home she became depressed because her children were her entire world."

In conclusion, the problem for women is that **they are the ones who have to deal with balancing work and family alone**, regardless of whether or not they have a professional career and a partner who helps out at home and with the family. The first thing to suffer is these women's **free and personal time**, which **disappears**, something that does not happen to men.

"We talk about balancing work and family because we go straight from work to a place where we have to take care of little kids, the elderly... what most concerns me is that we have to balance all this. A man does not even think about balancing his personal and work life. My partner is fantastic in this sense, but he goes to the gym and I don't. It's interesting, I'm the one who has to balance everything. All I do is work and go home, and go from home to work... and sometimes I think it's just me but then I talk to other people and I realise it isn't."

3.2. THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Mothers are still the primary parent to interact with the school even though **fathers have become more involved**, especially if the school and work are located nearby. In any event, schools themselves give priority to mothers when communicating with the family.

"My perception is that the schools first communicate with mothers because they call the mothers first and then if they don't respond they call the fathers. I don't think that it should be like that because fathers are also interested in knowing everything about their kids, both good and bad."

Plus, some **sexist behaviours** were noticed in terms of what was asked of boys and girls in their obligations in the school lunchroom, for example, or sexist tones in school textbooks.

"I think that education should not be sexist, because it still is. My son is 9 years old and in his science textbooks there is still a great deal of gender bias. And I can see in the lunchroom that there are certain practices or habits that they teach the same to boys and girls, but when enforcing them boys and girls are not asked the same. Why is boys' behaviour justified when girls' isn't?"

One of the main problems is **balancing the parents' school and work timetables**. The main points of contention are:

- **Three-month summer vacation from school** are impossible for anyone working in any company to take off. Parents are forced to hire a service that replaces the school for at least two of these months.
- The **beginning and end of the academic year** in September and June create additional problems for parents due to shorter school hours.
- **Meetings, activities and tutorials** with the school always take place during working hours; no thought is given to the difficulties parents face to attend them.

In view of these difficulties, several women made the following proposal:

*DC: There should be air conditioning at school; it seems like we're in the 18th century; they should put heating and air condition. Plus, why are there 3 months of vacation?
IA: Right, right absolutely.
DC: There should only be one month of vacation and eleven months of school, even though the summer months can be more oriented at playing. And if the*

teachers need more time off because they're exhausted, they can work in shifts...

With regard to **experiences in balancing work and school that schools** have done, they **point out small actions** by the parent-teacher associations **involving extending the school timetable**, with an additional cost. However, according to the women interviewed, these are not lasting solutions to the current problem:

"I think that for some time now the schools and the PTAs have been trying to work, but they only manage to put on patches, and I'm not saying that it's their fault. The entire educational system should be rethought, taking a step forwards towards balancing work and family life; if not it's impossible. Nothing fits together, there's work on the one hand and education on the other, so I think that everything done from this standpoint is basically patching up holes."

Nor has the experience of **adding a sixth hour of school** in the public school system **helped the work-school balance** as it was not added in the afternoon (from 5 to 6 pm) due to opposition from the teachers.

"In terms of balancing school and work, it hasn't solved anything because the extra hour was added at lunchtime instead of after school. It's got worse because before people had two hours to eat and they could pick up their kids from school, but now they can't so they have to leave them in the lunchroom and pay more. I doubt this has solved anything."

3.3. SPACE AND TIME STRATEGIES

Globally, work and family reconciliation strategies are still used on three levels, in the following order: family/social network, market and state. However, since mothers are the main ones organising this balancing act, they use strategies involving space and time. That is, strategies in which proximity, mobility and timetables are the key pieces to be balanced.

"I usually interact with the school because I work near it."

On the **social network** level, some mothers have found one way of balancing work and family through other mothers at their children's school who are in a similar family and professional situation and who share the same problems. The most important factor is that they understand each other's situations and no justification is needed. This type of exchange of

care-giving grows **informally**, given the fact that many women have the same problems.

"One of the best solutions has been the network of mothers that work and (our children) go to the same school. For example, today I've stayed with the whole "team" this afternoon and this afternoon she has taken care of all of them. This network is what is helping me the most, because they are in the same situation you are and you don't have to go to lengthy explanations, which is what bugs me the most. You say I can't and they understand that it's because you're working or in meetings and they pick up the kids, but I know that next week I'll do the same for her."

Another crucial means of support are grandparents, especially **grandmothers**. However, they may not always be a work-family balance strategy because in some cases they are too old and need care themselves, while in others they are too young and still in the job market.

"I'm going to become a grandmother now and my daughter will miss what I had, because grandmothers nowadays work."

With regard to **market services**, the women claim that there are significant shortcomings and at the same time the costs of extracurricular activities and other services aimed at taking care of children end up devouring an entire salary. For example, one separated woman pays 800 euros per month for these services. Another woman questions the **quality** of the extracurricular services based on bad experiences.

"My husband and I have lots of jobs and we're always busy, but we are also flexible. We are away from our daughters from 8 am to 8 pm. Since I have no family here, I've had to use day care and paid babysitters, but it's no big deal. As long as you have some time you can share, it's enough, it doesn't have to be all afternoon. You always have the weekends."

With regard to services aimed at **dependent elderly people**, they are even more scarce and costly. For example, several women bemoaned the fact that there are so few senior citizen day care centres, which forces them to find solutions on the underground economy, and they also mentioned the high cost of senior citizen homes. Several proposals were made along these lines, including raising taxes in order to finance these services.

*DC: Now there are starting to be senior citizen homes... but there are very few day care centres and they're very slow.
ED: You'd have to combine it with your work schedule; leave them there in the morning when you go to work...
DC: There are some, but outside Figueras.
ED: And they're affordable, aren't they?*

*DC: I don't know about the day care centres, but the senior citizen homes can range from 1,200 to 1,800 euros per month.
ED: The state pension should at least cover these services, and if there were day care centres too...*

With regard to public services, the women also bemoaned the fact that the social services are primarily aimed at women who do not work, with a vast **deficit in services for working women**. They claim that these services are aimed at immigrant women; however, one of the women interviewed, who comes from Morocco, doubts that they meet these women's needs either. In any event, there is a perception of competition for public services or aid due to the fragile status of the welfare state.

"I condemn the fact that the state helps working women much less and puts up more obstacles than for women who don't work and fulfil their traditional role. They give all the aid for women who stay at home and don't earn wages, but I work outside the home and don't get anything."

3.4. POLICIES PROMOTING WOMEN

The first point mentioned is that **public administration workers are given many more facilities than women working in private enterprise**. However, the flip side of the coin is that a man will be promoted in the public administration before a woman, so gender discrimination still persists.

"When they were littler I had to negotiate my timetable; they give it to you because the law allows it in the public sphere, but it's clear that you accept it in exchange for forgetting about any chance at promotion. In the private sphere things must be much more complicated."

With regard to **policies promoting women**, the first thing mentioned is that **they were not aware of any or do not perceive that there are any**. There was more talk about policies aimed at protecting women through positive discrimination. Even though the women deemed that these policies are still necessary, some said that **they are very negative for working women** or women looking for a job, since companies associate women with problems, leaves of absence, family responsibilities, etc., and this couples with other forms of discrimination, such as the fact that women are paid less for the same job, or that companies prefer women with older children instead of smaller ones, etc. Thus, these policies have a **rebound effect and end up upholding the status quo**.

CC: *There are some women who have it really bad and the policies are aimed at protection, not at promotion at all. They are aid-oriented policies so that women can join the workforce in a normal way. Immigrant working women have it really tough, because there aren't any services either, and they can't get access to few services there are, it's a vicious circle.*

AO: *I don't agree with policies protecting women because they end up leading companies to avoid hiring women because they think that they have too many family responsibilities. Instead of protecting women so much, we could invest in services that help women balance work and school.*

CC: *No, it should be complementary. One thing without the other is a dead end.*

In this sense, in the debate as to whether women always bear more of the brunt of family responsibilities and are thus more problematic than men, there are clashing opinions. However, three of the women had given up their maternity leave because their flexible timetables allowed them to do so.

On the other hand, they say that **policies promoting women are not necessary because women can promote themselves**. One example is the fact that currently women are more highly educated than men, even though they do not have equal access to all the labour sectors.

ED: *They don't need to promote us! We can promote ourselves, we can take care of ourselves.*

IA: *We only ask not to be discriminated against.*

ED: *Nobody should be selling us.*

DC: *But maybe they should value us more.*

ED: *Like women's policies: we're going to help women. Sorry, I already take care of myself, they treat you like a disabled person. Don't promote us, but don't put up so many obstacles either.*

But all the women agreed on the **need to have more public services to help balance** work and family, and more **education** for both men and women as a means to **break with the traditional gender roles**.

3.5. WORK AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF BEING MOTHERS

There are very few cases of women who say that **being a mother has not had a direct influence on their work and social lives**. Some say that they have only **adapted to the situation**, but the majority claim that they have experienced **both very positive and very negative consequences**.

In terms of the **negative consequences**, they include giving up certain facets of their lives, and they highlighted cases like:

- The obligation to give up professional promotions (the so-called glass ceiling that affects many women but not men)

"It has affected my professional career since to get promoted you need a CV and if you have children you can no longer take courses where you have to travel, etc. And your CV gets smaller, while in contrast your male colleagues have the chance to do it and they get promoted much sooner."

Some have to give up their job, their social circle, their free time, and more to take care of their children.

"I don't have time for myself anymore, and my husband has time to play sports and I don't even have time to get my hair done. Before I used to be well-dressed and wear make-up but now I don't even look in the mirror. Well, I prefer to be with my children than the way I used to be."

- Or they have to give up their family life by not spending "enough" time on being a mother.

"I haven't had a choice because my experience is in positions of responsibility and management, and this takes priority over other personal decisions."

As a **result of this lack of work and family balance and giving up things** in one of the two worlds, the following issues were listed.

- High monetary cost for solutions to help balance work and family.
- Sense of guilt for not fulfilling the care-giver role.
- Lack of understanding from the social environment about everyday organisation.
- Constant justification of family decisions, especially felt by women who are entrepreneurs, executives and politicians.
- Stress and a loss of quality of life.

In terms of **positive consequences**, this situation has led women to develop high time management and work skills and to have a greater ability to negotiate. However, women negotiate more and better than men for leaves of absence due to the traditional cultural roles, not because they have chosen to do so. They also explain that it is easier to negotiate if the boss is the same sex (due to affinity) or if she is female.

4. EVOLUTION AND PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The overall idea that appeared in the forum is that **equality will be reached** over time, due to the fact that the change between generations has already been quite marked. In any event, the women suggested an important **battery of proposals for improving the current situation** which can guide us as to the strategic lines that should be sought to achieve a better balance between work and family. The first suggestion involves a change in the approach to the problem.

4.1. THE APPROACH: FROM INDIVIDUAL BATTLE TO COLLECTIVE EFFORT

To women, the approach is clear: work-family balance is a **collective problem** that affects all aspects of our lives, and this responsibility cannot just fall on them or on the family. Specifically, they say:

- Balancing work and family **is not a battle each family should wage** with the company, school and society, rather it is a collective problem that affects children, that is, the future of the country.

"Excuse me, but this cannot be a daily battle in my house, in my neighbour's house and in my other neighbour's house and no one offers a solution, especially when what is at stake is raising children to take over the reins tomorrow, and they tell us we should have children!"

- Thinking about using common sense when **organising people's time** (work, training, free time) from a society that facilitates this balance, as opposed to one that creates more complications.
- **Not associating work-family balance problems with policies on promoting women** because this means perpetuating the stereotypes. Balancing work and family affects both men and women, but women bear the brunt of it instead of setting up public or private services.

4.2. PROPOSALS FOR WORK-FAMILY BALANCE POLICIES

The women interviewed offered **proposals for action** with different degrees of specificity within a broad range of sectors. These suggestions spotlight policies aimed at **companies**, at **schools** and educational spaces and at **families**, as well as the need for **compatible timetables**, **public services** adopted to the needs of the different family models and special actions to take care of **dependent elderly people**, a group that will become much more important if the current demographic trends persist.

1) GLOBAL TIMETABLE COMPACT FOLLOWING EUROPEAN MODELS

- With the goal of having to make fewer personal arrangements and achieving a higher quality of life, one proposal is to **define the school, business and shop timetables** following a model more similar to those found in other European countries. That is, to begin and end earlier without such a long midday break, or even intensive morning-only workdays.

"One thing should be done and it's very difficult: it would be for all the bigwigs in education, medicine, the public administration, management agents and trade union reps to sit down all together and set up coordinated working times, make-up times, etc. Now they try but everyone's pursuing their own interests."

"It's a question of setting European working times, this idea of work stopping at 9-10 pm is not okay. It should stop at 6-7 pm and schools should stay in session more hours to adapt to working hours, even if they're not spent on academic stuff, just free time."

- At the same time, the women called for **measuring a job by objectives** or by performance as opposed to by hours, as in Spain people work many more hours than in other European countries, yet they are less productive. In this sense, they think it is necessary to **make workdays more flexible**, by holding meetings during working hours and making more extensive use of telecommuting.

"Many jobs could be done from home, encouraging telecommuting regardless of whether you're a man or woman. This entails major social changes. In many areas, workdays could be lowered and society could be educated to adapt. For example shop hours are awful; they could be lowered. Many technical positions could be adapted to the workplace or by projects."

2) PUBLIC SERVICES ADAPTED TO THE DIVERSITY OF SITUATIONS

- **Public services, coordinated with schools and adapted to the diverse needs** of families, are key elements in the opinion of the women surveyed to reducing problems of balancing work and family and the discrimination that women suffer due to their role as care-givers. To finance them, several women would be willing to **pay 1% of their salary** if they were assured that it would be earmarked for services to take care of the elderly and children.
- Likewise, there was a specific proposal to create **a temporary emergency service** for situations in which no one (in either the nuclear family/social network, nor public or private services) could take care of the children.

"Situations I've experienced: while my mother was in the hospital in Barcelona, my baby was in the hospital in Girona and my other children would leave school, and at work they were calling me because there was an urgent matter... in these situations you say, sorry, I just can't. I think that if there were more services, at least in serious situations you could say go pick my kid up from school, if you don't have anyone who can help you."

3) POLICIES FOR COMPANIES

- The women believe it is necessary to **balance the situation and the rights of private enterprise with those of the public sphere** through regulations, legislation and information aimed at business people. At the same time, **leaves of absence should be equalised between men and women** (especially the ones that are exclusive) in order to lower discrimination against women due to their association with family burdens. Thirdly, **work-family balance initiatives should be fostered** in companies through awareness-raising and sensitisation.
- Likewise, one of the women suggested making **everyday life policies** that are cheap but highly profitable from a social standpoint, such as creating play areas in companies, service stations... and fostering **"children-friendly establishments"**.

"I am more concerned about things in everyday life, like when you're at the butcher's and there's Lego (a toy) for the kids to play with, in service stations... I travel with my children a lot and I know the service stations in Europe with playgrounds, and if I'm near there I stop on purpose. Plus, these are things that do not cost very much but they are very socially profitable."

- On a practical level, our interviewees proposed an **agreed system to make up hours** in companies, as right now they are afraid to miss hours to solve family problems and they end up using tricks, like simulated leaves of absence for depression, etc.

"The main problem is tricks; parents have to invent leaves of absence to be able to care for their children and this harms the company. It's a shame, it would be better to have something solid set up, and if you miss hours you can make them up later without being afraid of saying I have to be home because it's my duty. Now we are creating camouflaged leaves of absence and nonexistent depressions."

4) POLICIES FOR FAMILIES

- What is needed first is for **information on equality, co-responsibility and the work-family balance** to be spread, which could be done via advertising campaigns, as has been done in the past. However at the same time, we also need **the help and support of fathers and mothers** so that they can improve their child-rearing and work-family balance strategies. Some specific proposals include: parenting schools, aid to support newborns at home, promoting child-rearing, aid for networks of care-giving parents, time banks, breather services, etc.
- Other proposals for aids to families with dependent children include **widespread discounts** for large families, the extension of **maternity and paternity leave**, and expanding the budgets for **short- and long-term leaves of absence**, as well as specific aid for **separated families**, in which everything is more complex and costly.

"Some type of aid for separated families. If I didn't have my parents around it would be extremely complicated. I am lucky enough that they can take care of my kids. When a family deviates from the norm everything is more complicated and expensive, and aids are still designed for nuclear families, which are the norm, but society is no longer like that, we have to modernise things."

5) POLICIES FOR SCHOOLS

- About the contents and habits that are taught, the women asked that children be **educated following a model of equality** although they did bear in mind that the school is a reflection of society.

"Actions should be taken in schools – that's the only solution, schools should teach that household life involves everyone, that until a few generations go by and they take this for granted things won't be able to change."

- The most frequent proposal was to **reconsider the three months of summer vacation** by putting air conditioning in schools so that they can teach classes 11 months a year, even though the summer classes would be more fun-oriented. However, to do this, more teachers would have to be hired.
- Plus, mothers of small children asked that the **half-day adaptation periods at the start and end of the academic year** be eliminated, as they lengthen the summer period by almost a full month and require alternative private arrangements that tend to be very costly.
- The **sixth hour in primary schools** was deemed positive to help balance work and family as long as it was added between 5 and 6 pm, not from 12 to 1 pm, when it **only creates more difficulties for parents.**

6) MEASURES FOR DEPENDENT PERSONS

- The new **Law on Dependency will mean aid**, but the women do not believe that this aid will reach everyone. In any event, it will help to regularise the care-giver jobs held by many immigrant women and it will be a small support to help pay for this care. However, the women do **not** believe that it is focused on **working women who are also care-givers**, rather it is solely aimed at men/women who do not work and who take care of a family member.
- In any event, **more senior citizen day care centres and homes at affordable prices** are needed that can be financed by the elderly

persons themselves with their own pensions, as currently this is impossible.

III. PART TWO: RESULTS OF THE PARTICIPATORY FORUMS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

1. THE WORK-FAMILY BALANCE AND ITS PROBLEMS

For the people interviewed, balancing work and family consists of **coordinating work and children's schools hours** in an effort to reach a **balance between the different facets** of their lives: work, family and personal. Yet the participants stated that nowadays **there is not the least bit of coordination between the different timetables**, a fact that leads to several different serious problems.

"The main problem is the work, school and personal timetables. A time has to be found for each thing without doing without the others. Workdays are not planned to be combined with the family. But school hours are the worst."

- According to the experts interviewed, balancing work and family is a very serious problem that has only begun to be **spoken about very recently**. There are people in the field of education that did not know what it was, although they quickly identified with its consequences on a personal level.

"It's a huge problem and now people are beginning to talk about it. Raising people's awareness is very positive, but no measures are being put into place yet."

- In different spheres and resources within the world of education, all share the opinion that **the root of the problems of balancing work and family are not being properly focused on, nor are their possible solutions**, as the focus should be more on companies than on schools.

"The first issue is work hours, when we talk about balancing work and family we talk about school hours and many measures (the sixth hour, extracurricular activities) but few initiatives related to work hours."

"We have the problem of balancing work and family because we haven't organised things better in our society. The school and work schedules are not coordinated and patches are being put on. It can be solved from the school side, but it would be better to solve it from the working world, to begin and end earlier – that's not considered."

- In the world of education there is a widespread view that **extending school hours or free-time or fun services is negative** for the children and their families because **it is educationally counter-productive** and it does not foster family relationships. The experts interviewed often saw **contradictions and incompatibilities** between the goals of **educating and balancing work and family** in a single service.

"There have been suggestions to extend the school calendar as parents request, because they have the problem of balancing work and family, but we're already in the country where the children spend the most time at school and we don't even have good levels of attainment."

"If it is an entity that offers free time activities for educational purposes, the children have to participate with the parameters given from the start, and if they have educational goals they will not likely be designed so that the children spend more time outside the home. In any event, you say that since this is the situation right now, let's see if we can do something about it, but you have to expose yourself to the fact that sometimes the children come and sometimes they don't, because if the priority is the parents balancing work and family..."

2. CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORK-FAMILY BALANCE FROM THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

The majority of the people interviewed highlighted that the responses to **balancing work and family should come from the workplace** (timetables, flexibility, leaves of absence, etc.) **via a global compact** that would also take schools into account. In this sense, they point to the huge **differences** in work-family balance measures between the **public and private sector**, and especially **with teachers**, who have a timetable that coincides with their children's school hours. This is the direction we should head towards:

"I am a mother, but since I'm a teacher our timetables are very similar. Personally, this is not a problem for me. You can do part of your work from home, and it's even easier with the new technologies. Telecommuting has made great strides."

In any event, due to the current situation, **measures** are being taken in different spheres with regard to the **field of education and childhood** to try to make it a little easier for families to balance work and family by combining it with an **educational underpinning**. We have classified these measures by the

different institutions: the public administration, schools, parent-teacher associations (PTAs), sports and hiking associations, and finally free-time companies.

2.1. ACTIONS BY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

What is highlighted about the public administration is its **limited authority on work-family balance matters**, that is, its possibility of changing timetables, negotiating with companies, etc. In any event, with regard to services to take care of children from the ages of birth to three, in Figueres (capital of the Alt Empordà) even though there are still not enough places, there are three public nursery schools and two more are in the works.

"As a city councillor of education I don't know what I can do to remedy this situation. The Town Hall has very little authority on this matter. The "casals" (after-school organisations) are expensive and the grandparents play a key role in balancing work and family. The PTAs organise activities at schools and the Town Hall promotes them."

In Catalonia, public **play areas** are being promoted where parents can leave their children for one hour at a low cost (€1). The **Alt Empordà County Council** has two preventative programmes aimed at providing training and support for families with children between the ages of birth and three years old. One is the **Family Space**, targeted at families with children aged birth to three who do not go to school; its actions are aimed at working together on raising the children. The other is the **Parenting School**, aimed at parents of school-aged children in day care facilities, and it offers talks on different aspects of child-rearing.

"These programmes try to raise parents' awareness of how family relationships and affective ties with the care-givers affect their children's personal growth. They leave much of the child-rearing burden on the schools and many professionals are not prepared for this."

Yet there is no doubt that the most important actions aimed at balancing work and family, as the problem currently stands, are the **subsidies from the Department of Education of the Catalan regional government** (Generalitat de Catalunya) **for PTAs and other similar organisations** in the areas of sports and free-time activities that allows them to manage services during the academic years and in the summer.

2.2. SCHOOL-BASED ACTIONS

As mentioned above, the message from the experts in the field of education and schools is that **schools can help to balance work and family life, but this is not their primary purpose**, so if there is a **contradiction between the educational goal** of a measure and **work-family balance**, it will be resolved in favour of the educational goal. One example is the issue of **extending the school timetable**, which on the one hand would help parents balance work and family, but which **educationally** could not be sustained. In fact, since last year the timetable of primary school has been extended one hour for educational reasons, which is causing major problems of balancing work and family, as the timetables between children are different.

"The sixth hour was put into place as an educational measure, but it has created problems balancing work and family because the little ones who do not finish at 1 pm have to wait for their siblings for one hour."

Thus, the schools adapt to the extent possible to **parents' timetables when there are meetings and tutorials**, even though the experts acknowledge that there is never a good time for parents. On the school calendar, too, efforts are made to make the **school holidays** coincide with the parents' holidays, although the schools admit that **they cannot always adapt** their students' activities to work timetables, thus making it impossible for many parents to attend.

"Schools can try to make things easier, but it's not their job. We put the elective holidays when there is a long weekend and the parents don't work. The meetings are scheduled for 8-9 pm, but if there are activities in the afternoon many can't participate."

On the other hand, **the schools work with the PTAs and other entities** holding extracurricular activities by lending spaces for the activities such as the library, the sports facilities, etc.

2.3. ACTIONS BY CITIZEN ASSOCIATIONS

Citizen associations play a **key role** in offering all sorts of activities that extend the school timetable enough for the family to take over the care of their children.

Of all these associations, one of the most active and close to the problem is the **PTAs, (Parent-Teacher Associations), which organise a wide range of activities according to the school's needs and the parents' requests.** They are financed through public aid, although **the entire management depends on the parents' organisation.** Their philosophy is to cover the areas that neither the administration nor the market cover.

"In summer we don't provide services because there is already a private service and we shouldn't to compete. Our philosophy is to cover the gaps in the public and private services. Parents also send us their requests and we try to meet them with the resources we have."

The remaining entities tend to be related to **specific activities:** sports, hiking, etc. They often **work directly with the PTAs** by sending them monitors, while other times they are **complementary:** while the PTAs are in charge of activities during the week, these associations offer alternatives for the weekend and vacation.

"We run the Catalonia school games in the county on Saturdays from 9:30 to 2:00 with the nursery and primary schools and on Friday afternoons with the secondary schools. During the academic year we hold sports activities in the schools in the afternoons from 5-6:30."

These organisations **help people achieve a work-family balance,** even though this is not their direct purpose, as they **prioritise the educational goals** of the activities and do not like to feel that they are a "nursery school for older children." Plus, they acknowledge that the **family and social network** is a much more powerful work-family balance strategy.

"We have not specifically framed it as balancing work and family, but they have significant repercussions. They are projects that help specific people and can solve problems for them, such as in the morning because many people start working at 8. But it's a small portion (20-30 children); having grandparents or a network of parents of friends helps much more."

Below is a list of some of the services that they provide:

- **Childcare hour** in the morning via a playroom service before school begins (7:45-9:00 am).
- **School transport and lunchroom service** (in conjunction with the County Council).
- **Extracurricular activities** of different types at the school: sports, artistic and educational (5:00-6:30 pm).

- **Service of attending to diversity** for children with needs for support in organising their homework (5:00-6:00 pm).
- **Sports and hiking activities on weekends and vacations.**
- **“Casal”** with playtime activities during the months of **June and September.**

Even though the PTA and sports and hiking entities play a key role in helping families to balance their work and personal lives, they acknowledge that they are **organisations on the decline that that parents’ involvement is also waning.**

LS: The entities bear the brunt because they are affected and have no choice. As a mother and teacher, there is more or less involvement in the PTAs depending on the time.

MR: There are very few people on both levels, organisation and users. If you pay the fee you have services and discounts on books, etc. There are people who do not, but it's worth it just for the discounts on textbooks, but there are still people who think that the PTA is keeping their money.

LS: We all have more or less time, but if it doesn't give you anything economic or in terms of prestige...

2.4. ACTIONS BY COMPANIES OFFERING FREE TIME ACTIVITIES

Currently there is a **multitude of extracurricular activities available**, but the companies themselves warn that not all of them work the same. Once again, the **approach is very different depending on whether the goal is educational or to help families balance work and family life.** If education is the priority, they do not consider extending the school hours or overextending the service, because this would led to a loss in quality and negative consequences for families.

“I wouldn't provide any service from 8 am to 8 pm. It's important for children to rest, and after 8 hours they need the reference of their mother, it makes no educational sense. We talk with the parents a lot and they ask us things, but if we don't do it they have to seek alternatives in their social or family circle or by working less. We don't want to overextend the service, plus it just undermines family life.”

Companies offer their own in-house services and work in conjunction with the local administrations and schools, offering many of the services mentioned above, but also:

- **Rest areas for mothers** (9:00-10:00 pm), where they can share child-rearing experiences.
- **Promoting children's activities** in small towns.
- Participating in **local educational plans**, such as "Planes de Entorno".

Comment [U1]: ¿qué son?
Necesitaría una explicación para poderlo traducir o explicar en inglés.

3. PROFILE OF BENEFICIARY FAMILIES

We can define several facets in the profile of the families and children who benefit from the work-family balance services. Each **region has its own characteristics** in terms of the income level and origin of its inhabitants which influences who benefits from each service. In the Alt Empordà, the income levels and immigration rates are higher than the Spanish and Catalan average, yet the distribution is not uniform all over the county. For example, in Figueres there are several public schools where more than 50% of the students are immigrants. Below are the **socio-economic profile of the beneficiaries** (income level, origin, gender and age) via the **experts' perceptions**.

By **income level**, the first factor mentioned is that the problems balancing work and family life **affect families in the high, medium and low income brackets**, even though the situations are different, as some need to work more to keep up their social status or professional careers, while others work more because they need to in order to pay their bills.

According to the experts interviewed, the **worst situations are found in the lower income brackets** because the jobs are more unstable and the salaries are lower, which often exclude extracurricular activities as an option, which would be extremely helpful for them. There is the **possibility of getting public aid**, but the competition for it is extremely stiff since the arrival of many immigrant families without resources. Certain free services, such as the Family Space or the activities in the **Plan de Entorno**, are used by families that would not be able to balance work and family without them.

"Families with low socio-economic situations do not benefit as much. Sometimes there is some type of social action that reaches them. Our school has a medium level; they cannot participate in the morning play hour or in extracurricular activities because they can't afford them, and sometimes the CCAE helps."

In terms of the **provenance of the beneficiaries**, immigrant parents participate in their children's school life, although **their involvement in extracurricular services varies**, and on some occasions there is a certain

perception of segregation between the local and immigrant population in the free time activities for reasons of affordability, habits, etc.

"There are many different projects, more immigrant population in the service attending to diversity or in multicultural activities. In the day care and extracurricular activities, the kids are from here. The extended family, grandparents, etc. are the resources these families use to balance work and family, especially at lunch time, and the immigrants do not leave their children in the lunchroom."

The degree of involvement is also **different according to the home country of the children**. The ones who most **mistrust in the services** seem to be those from North Africa. There is **more involvement by the people from Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe**, even though money is still a limiting factor. The situation of foreign EU children is more similar to that of local children.

"They are mainly children from Figueres, some Moroccan and South American children... the Moroccans know about it but don't really trust it, the parents don't come. With the South American population it's easier to get them involved in free time activities, but with the Moroccans things have not gelled."

The immigrant population also has **programmes that are fairly specifically tailored to their needs**, even though they are not solely targeted at this population. Examples are the service attending to diversity and the **Plan de Entorno**, where the majority of beneficiaries are immigrants.

In terms of **gender**, both boys and girls take part in these activities, yet when considering family aids to help families balance personal and work lives, there is once again a perception in the field of education that there is a **lack of services for working women**, who thus having to take on a dual role.

"There is a lack of services for working women in private enterprise who are the ones who have it the worst, and within the public sector too there are many degrees. The majority of services are targeted to women who don't work and immigrant women, because they're the ones with the lowest income."

Finally, in terms of **ages**, there is **greater involvement by children** when they are younger, and when **they reach adolescence they stop being involved or they lower their participation in educational, sports and cultural activities** outside the school.

4. MORE INTERACTION WITH THE MOTHERS

To the people interviewed, the mothers are the ones who **suffer the most when trying to balance work and family**, as they are the ones with the **most contact with the schools, paediatricians, extracurricular activities...** They are also more often the ones to request leaves of absence and tend to have less stable jobs. Plus, in the case of women who are incapable of balancing their jobs with taking care of their children and have to delegate this care-giving to another person, **they tend to feel a sense of guilt.**

"There is still an important female role in contact with the school; the mothers are at the meetings and come pick up the children."

In any event, the experts pointed out that **more and more fathers are getting involved in their children's education**, as they also suffer from problems balancing work and family and feel a sense of guilt for not being able to be more involved with their children. This is especially found when both father and mother consider their children's **education very important**, and there is the perception that **middle and upper class fathers are more heavily involved.**

"This summer I was surprised because half were men and half were women picking the kids up from the summer day camp; they were both immigrants and from here. The higher the economic level the more the mother and father combine childcare in the morning and afternoons, and it's common to see fathers with pushchairs."

At any rate, generally speaking it is **the mother who is involved in school meetings and tutorials**, even though the fathers may make a showing, and there are more mothers on the PTAs than fathers (although not executive-level mothers). **Men** continue to play an **optional, voluntary role** in their involvement with the school, and they tend to be the interlocutor when the family wishes to **discuss an issue with authority.**

JF: Generally speaking, the perception is that there are more women than men at the school gates, mainly mothers are more involved. Who asks for a day off when their child is ill?

LS: In secondary school we find that first the mothers come to the meetings, and when things start to get heated the fathers come. Both because of what you say about their child and if there is a complaint.

MR: Men have the authority... this is conveyed to the children. What a way to undermine the mothers! I think that society is changing very gradually; perhaps before the fathers couldn't get so involved.

5. ASSESSMENT OF ACTIONS AIMED AT BALANCING WORK AND FAMILY

Every expert from a given educational resource or from the field of free time activities **viewed their actions in favour of balancing work and family positively**, but **generally speaking there is a negative assessment of the situation**, as they acknowledge that the schools, PTAs, entities and companies are all putting **“patches” on work-family balance problems**. That is, partial, limited solutions are being offered instead of approaching the issue as a global problem in which we must all coordinate our timetables, especially companies.

“I think it's good that they do what they can, but when we talk about the public administration it doesn't do everything it could. It has not managed to get companies involved, because there are economic sectors that they have not managed to negotiate with.”

“There's lots of talk but nothing is done; I think it's terrible. I'm a mother and teacher and I think that schools are neither day care centres nor are they designed for children to be there all day long. Many children are away from home for many hours between school and extracurricular activities... and at the same time, the teachers are asked to do things that really the state should be doing.”

It should be said that to the experts interviewed, **the work-family balance is a serious problem but not their main goal when planning actions**. This balance appears as a collateral effect, and they question whether it is compatible or complementary with the goals of education.

MR: The goal as a primary school is clear. But should balancing work and family be a goal, why not? Making it compatible with the educational goals. Because educating these children well also means their having a good relationship with their parents, in the long term this will help them be more mature and independent, to be more secure...

LS: The free time activities either have educational goals or are done so that the children are taken care of outside the home. These are two different things and they're not compatible. Because our timetables are different, so what needs are you meeting if you have to adapt to all of them? Are you always open and they come and go as they please? It's very hard. I think that the work-family balance has to be solved elsewhere.

The **citizen entities like PTAs, sports associations, hiking groups**, etc. play an **important role** in facilitating the work-family balance, even though the number of **people involved is on the wane**.

Parents are increasingly demanding extended services so that their children will be taken care of, and it is up to these companies to decide whether they will respond or not, even though **educationally it may not be the wisest course of action**.

Likewise, the experts positively viewed the **preventative and educational efforts of the Parenting School and the Family Space**, even though better dissemination and extension of the activities would help to get more people to participate.

"They are positive actions; parents leave contented and surprised; they always learn something. The Parenting School should be pushed more because it helps to reflect and disseminate better, beyond the Family Space, and it should be a stable space open all year round. So that all parents know that they have these resources available to them in their town."

Finally, they point to the enormous **importance of social and family networks** to help balance work and family, which educationally, too, are necessary and are not sufficiently acknowledged.

"On the level of welfare state they use the extended family. Without it many more social and public services would be needed, but it is very hidden work. We use the grandparents a great deal; I don't think that's a bad thing, but if you don't have that option it's more difficult. This network helps you to combine timetables and have more free time."

6. EVOLUTION AND PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT

6.1. EVOLUTION IN THE CURRENT SITUATION

There are different views on the evolution of the current problems of balancing work and family. Some are **positive**, in the sense that **men are getting more involved in education**, and that **work-family balance measures at work** have risen a great deal in recent years. However, **most** of the visions were **negative**, as outlined below.

Generally speaking, the interviewees believed that the evolution is negative due to the **pace of work and the consumer needs** of today's society, which tend to be promoted from the realm of politics, **by lengthening and extending shop hours**. This is exactly the contrary of what is desired: to rationalise shop hours with a model more similar to that of other European countries.

"Now it's time for Christmas shopping and the businesses are open on Sundays, long weekends... half of Catalonia will have a long weekend and the other half will be working because the timetables are extended, and I don't think that's right at all."

Second of all, the **difficulties and problems in family relationships that negatively effect children's motivation, security and self-esteem** do not seem to on the wane. Educational and psychological problems are on the rise in families where there is little contact between parents and children.

*MR: I am finding more and more children with severe self-esteem and security problems, and behind them are problems arising from having delegated the role of care-giver to others.
JF: In university studies, you can see how cases of depression among adolescents in families with very little parent-children contact is on the rise. As society is going now, the pressure is greater and greater to work more hours, and we talk about a welfare state like America – we're taking the wrong tack.*

Thirdly, one of the experts, the headmaster of a school, mentioned the **cultural and social poverty of both children and their parents**, as they have very little interest in the children's education and a high standard of living to consume according to the latest trends.

"We are entering a stage of cultural and social poverty. There is money for mass consumption (...) many parents have not internalised the importance of educating their children in a holistic way; they leave that to the school."

The difficulties in balancing work and family currently fall on **small companies**, which are more common in the region, and on **women**, who more often suffer from workplace discrimination because of their other role as care-givers. These situations **are even more complicated in separated and single-parent families**. Likewise, cases are detected of new parents with a **lack of reflection and responsibility** about what parenthood entails, even though the most common situation is the **reduction in the number of children wanted** or simply not having children.

"Work-family balance policies should be made by the state and the regional government; they can't fall on small companies because if they do they won't hire women. It is hypocritical, when you have children the mother is the one who is in charge of everything; the man who is the exception."

6.2. PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Generally speaking, the proposals are aimed at making headway towards a **compact on timetables between companies, trade unions and public administration, either at state or regional level**. The goal would be to draw closer to the **European model of timetables** and achieve that demand from the past century: eight hours of work, eight hours of sleep and eight hours of free time.

"The field of education can do things, but what can do the most is to have companies, trade unions and public administrations negotiate. Oftentimes steps are not taken not because they can't but because it has to be promoted on the state and regional level. Except in the public administration, everyone works from 9 am to 8 pm, while quality of life is free time."

Below is a list of the **proposals** made by the group of experts targeted at companies, schools, families and the public administrations.

1) MEASURES FOR COMPANIES

It is crucial to **release parents from work burdens** so that they can take care of their children instead of putting in place services to replace the parents. This involves **companies' providing more facilities for balancing work and family** through greater **flexibility and adapting the work schedule to the school timetable**.

"If balancing work and family means that educational institutions open at 8 am and close at 8 pm, this to me is no balance. In my opinion you have to have a work schedule that allows you to have and raise your children. The only thing you can do is adapt my schedule, and if I have a meeting at my daughter's school, I have to be able to leave work and show a justification for the meeting without having to do anyone favours. Like going to the doctor... It's a question of priorities, as a country, what are we most interested in?"

Several specific proposals:

"If the husband or wife works half days they have lots of problems now. You have to encourage companies with lower taxes, like they do to encourage stable contracts, so that it is easier."

"Changing the country's conception, not working more hours but taking better care of our human capital, we see what performs better. In France they have work schedules that end at 6:30 pm. The families share their lives during the week. If companies closed at 5 pm we could do more."

"The mother or father should have a workday the same as the children's school day from when they are born until they finish primary school. Children need to be with their parents because if they aren't the kids explode when they turn 15. Plus, that way we could save the grandparents a lot of work and save money on extracurricular activities."

"Telecommuting needs to be encouraged. It could be applied to many jobs, plus it's better not to have people at work for eight hours and give them work so that they can organise themselves as they see fit. Balancing family and work would be much easier."

2) MEASURES FOR SCHOOLS

Our panel proposed **equalising school timetables, and having nursery schools and primary schools only meet in the mornings**, beginning and ending earlier, such as from 8 am to 4 pm, and if any parents cannot collect their children, setting up a day care service until 6 pm. The **vacation** period should also change:

"The vacation space should be regulated and divided better and balanced, because there are also other times of year that are very tiring for children."

Likewise, the **quality of extracurricular activities should be improved and they should be extended** all over the region. And new projects should be developed that make children and their parents more independent, such as **safe routes to and from school**.

3) MEASURES FOR FAMILIES

More training, support and prevention is needed for families on educational matters and childrearing which would help and guide them, even though it is difficult because some parents are reluctant.

*LS: Their awareness has to be raised. Depending on which mother is pregnant we can only put our hands on our head...
JF: So do we, there is a lack of awareness.
LM: Maybe a reflection, better awareness is needed... about what it means to be parents, like a parenting school before becoming parents...
MR: For example, at the parenting school this weekend the issue is how to foster family relationships in order to raise children's self-esteem, because this is an issue that parents aren't interested in. In contrast, if you conduct a session on "limits", all families understand that it is about how to punish children, and they all come. You try to work on the prevention side, and it's really hard.*

The division of household work has to be fostered within the couple, and the hidden work of grandparents and other members of the family and social network should come to light, as they are true elements in the work-family balance.

4) MEASURES FOR THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS

Aid is needed to help low-income families afford work-family balance services, which could be done via a co-payment. Likewise, we should encourage the **professionalisation of household and family jobs** involving caring for people. In this, the Law on Dependence is predicted to be crucial.

"The state should give aid for families. Having children today is a luxury, it's a major economic effort (free textbooks, school lunchroom, ...). It could be done with a co-payment system depending on each family's income."

Finally, **more nursery schools** and public facilities to help families balance work and family are needed:

"More nursery schools are necessary, but so is a system of leaves of absence for when the children get ill. More resources need to be allocated; everything else is just patches."

IV. CONCLUSIONS

With regard to the goals set by this study, first we can observe that the new workplace responsibilities have been superimposed over household responsibilities, which leads many women to experience situations that they describe as "impossible".

The goal of balancing work and family is not related to women but to how men and women can share the responsibility in the different spheres of life: personal, family and work. Currently, the imbalances between the division of roles are plentiful. For this reason, talking nowadays about women and the work-family balance means mixing two issues: gender discrimination and how families achieve this balance. While these issues are related, they have to be extricated from each other in order to manage to break the social stereotypes.

With regard to the state's role in this situation, it should be said that the work-family balance policies in place are not neutral and respond to different values and ways of approaching the work-family relationship. Along these lines, it is believed that Spain's 1999 Law on Work-Family Balance is designed to protect birth rates and the traditional family.

The only way to change the gender stereotypes is by educating both children and adults. It is necessary to explain and raise awareness that sharing the household and family work helps the couple's relationship and each member, as they gain autonomy and can better enjoy their children, while allowing the women to realise themselves professionally. Conversely, turning motherhood into an obstacle course is not appealing if one plans to have a professional career.

Shifting from individual battles to social challenges is regarded as a key element, and to achieve it we need a comprehensive view of the work-family balance, along with more public services and the facilitation of SPACE and TIME strategies.

Space strategies are related to the design of regions and towns taking into account the use of each space, such as the proximity of care-giving services to jobs, promoting telecommuting and preparing "safe routes" for children.

Several examples of time strategies include rationalising work, school and shop timetables so that they are in line with each other by drawing closer to the models used in other European countries, along with working by objectives as opposed to by hours.

For their part, the experts in the field of education understand families' problems when trying to balance it all, and they suffer from the consequences. However, they do not view themselves as the agents that should provide a solution. Apart from several issues that they would be willing to change, such as dividing vacation times better and making the timetable start and end earlier, they made it clear that the solutions have to come from companies and negotiations with the state.

According to the experts interviewed, the goals of balancing work and family may be contradictory to those of education, and they reject any actions that do not have an educational purpose. Educators feel overloaded by the care-giving responsibilities that families delegate to them, and they warn about the negative consequences of a weak family relationship both when children are small and as they grow.

They also state that families' lack of information about public or private educational services that can help them achieve a balance, along with the limited number of places and grants in public nursery schools, increase the perception of the lack of this type of service. This does nothing other than step

up the care-giving needs among the family and social network, which mainly has a negative impact on gender equality.

Along these lines, it might make sense to develop communication and information actions targeted at parents about the resources that they currently have at their disposal, as well as to open up spaces of dialogue about actions for specific needs (unusual working hours, single-parent families, low-income families, etc.).

Currently, with all its responsibility for caring for a raising children, the family is at odds with the business world, which views the work-family balance as an extra work burden for the remaining workers and associates it mainly with women. At the same time, families are experiencing tensions with the schools, which first perceive how they are being asked to take on more responsibilities for resolving work-family balance problems, and secondly are suffering educationally from the consequences of poor family relationships.



Within this context, the state should harmonise the tensions between families and companies, as well as between families and schools, especially in terms of timetables. Likewise, the state should also promote services and policies in which there is a broad consensus, because as a recently-published study stated, up to 65% of the population would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to improve support resources available to families.³

Below is a list of some of the proposals for work-family balance policies as a summary of the actions suggested by the mothers and experts in the field of education, along with other measures are also included that were drawn up by Constanza Tobío and Juan A. Fernández.⁴

³ GPI Consultores (2005) "Estudio sobre la conciliación de la vida familiar y la vida laboral: situación actual, necesidades y demandas". At: http://www.mtas.es/mujer/mujeres/estud_inves/Estudio%20conciliacion.pdf

⁴ TOBÍO, C; FERNÁNDEZ, J (2006) "Propuestas para una política eficaz de conciliación". Un Revista ABACCO, no 49-50.

1) FROM THE STATE: **Universal public services are needed to balance work and family** which are flexible in terms of timetables and include the perspective of fathers as care-givers and the new models of family. Specifically:

- Public nursery schools in order to solve work-family balance problems for children under the age of three. A universal service for single-parent families, or families in which the father and mother both work in the job market.
- A morning day care service, lunchroom, extracurricular activities, after school organisations ... with the goal of making it easier to balance the workday and school hours. This could include associations and companies that currently provide these services in the schools themselves, but the state should ensure that the service they provide is high quality and affordable for any family needing them (without either spatial nor economic barriers).
- Playtime-educational services to replace the school during vacations. The state should take on a role similar to the one outlined in the previous point.
- Services for dependent family members, especially day care centres that also resolve problems for families, which are increasingly extensive, involving taking care of the elderly.

2) FROM COMPANIES: **A change in mindset** is needed in companies with regard to their employees' work-family balance needs, raising awareness of the fact that satisfaction with these measures has a positive impact on the company (higher motivation, productivity, performance, etc.). However, the state should also take on part of the responsibilities for balancing work and family, by perhaps economically compensating companies.

- Facilitating schedule flexibility (shorter working days, telecommuting) and reducing workdays through collective bargaining, and encouraging companies to take these measures with tax breaks.
- The current status is for maternity and paternity leaves that are paid and exclusive, and parental leave for one of the two. These permits

should gradually be lengthened and be made paid as much as possible.

- Occasional leave of absence to care for ill children or exceptional situations related to children. Paid leave for children under the age of 12 of up to five days per year.

3) FROM THE SCHOOLS: Schools should accept **shared responsibility** with companies, the state and families, as agents to help resolve work-family balance problems, as several measures can be taken that can help out both educationally and family-wise.

- Harmonising school hours, and reaching an agreement on a timetable with companies without increasing the number of hours.
- Reorganising school vacations over the year in order to offset the differences in the current vacation periods. For this purpose, the schools would have to be physically prepared for the summer months.
- Working together with entities and the public administrations to support families in a variety of educational activities, such as parenting schools, in an effort to show how the work-family balance and education go hand-in-hand.

IV. APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: SCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEWS WITH THE WOMEN

1. The traditional family model defined two totally different roles for fathers and mothers. Currently there have been certain **changes in mothers' and fathers' roles**. In your opinion, what have these changes consisted of? What role do fathers and mothers play today in their children's upbringing? What is your personal experience?
2. If we understand that **there are different stages in children's lives**, do you think that fathers and mothers play different roles according to the stage their children are in?
3. We have witnessed the emergence of "**new family models**" which are quite different from the traditional patriarchal model in which the responsibility for the family falls on the man. We can make a list: couples living together without being married, single-parent families, couples with children from other marriages, families with homosexual parents, and the list goes on. Do you think that this has led to changes in motherhood and fatherhood?
4. Women's entry into the job market is currently a fact, yet it is also well-known that the **household chores** are more often done by women than men. How can we get mothers and fathers who both work outside the home to share the household chores equally? What are you experiencing living alone and/or with a partner?
5. Have you ever experienced **difficulties in balancing** work and family life? In what circumstances? If you have dealt with this situation, **what person or organisation** did you ask for help: What person or organisation ultimately helped you to combine the different roles and jobs?
6. Do you think that institutions such as **schools and places that care for and entertain children** are designed to interact more with mothers or fathers?
7. Do you think that there are **other institutions** that perhaps play a very important role in making it easier to balance work and family? Do you think that these institutions make it easy for fathers to get equally involved as well?

8. Do you think that there are any **institutions/organisations that hinder** mothers from balancing their work and family lives? Do you think that the same institutions also block fathers from getting involved?
9. It's not always easy to **negotiate with a boss** about the need to take care of one's family. What do mothers do nowadays do combine their paid work with family work? Have you ever experienced discrimination? Have you ever felt forced to lose a paid workday in order to take care of an ill child? How often? Do you think that men would negotiate with their bosses the same way that women do?
10. Does having children have any positive or negative impact on your **professional career and social life?** How would you explain this? When you look back at balancing your work and family life, would you say that you have always been able to choose the options you preferred? Have you ever found yourself in a situation of a lack of understanding or discrimination with regard to how to organise paid work time and family time?
11. What **measures, policies or actions** might public administrations and companies take so that citizens are better able to balance their work and family lives?

APPENDIX 2: SCRIPT OF THE PARTICIPATORY FORUM WITH WOMEN

1. Do you think that our society still upholds **the traditional stereotypes and male-female gender roles?**
2. **What sectors of society** do you think are trying to achieve a change in these roles, and what sectors do you think oppose this or are not interested in this change?
3. Do you think that **work-family balance policies**, that is, state actions on this issue, have helped to **promote women** or **change the traditional roles?**
4. What do you think **the state is doing** politically, economically and socially to **promote women?** Do you agree with it?
5. How do **schools** (and other educational free time resources for children/young people) **help families** balance their work and family lives? Are you aware of any **examples?**
6. Do you think that the schools' actions (or actions by educational or free time resources for children/young people) in the realm of achieving a work-family balance **have been successful?**
7. What are the future **consequences** of the lack of a work-family balance for men? What about for women? For children? For companies? And for society?
8. What actions would be necessary in order to achieve a situation of **co-responsibility and a balance of the different timetables? Who** should do what (the state, schools, companies, women, etc.)?
9. What should the **state** (or companies, etc.) do **to promote** women politically, economically and socially?

APPENDIX 3: SCRIPT OF THE INTERVIEW WITH EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

1. The issue of balancing work and family life is gaining momentum in public policies and the media. How would you define it?
2. Based on your professional experience, what problems does the lack of a work-family balance lead to in families?
3. How do schools (and other educational and free time resources) contribute to helping families balance work and family life?
4. Who are the main beneficiaries of these measures? Is there any kind of prerequisite to be a beneficiary of these measures?
5. How would you describe the typical beneficiary of these measures (sex, age, socio-economic status, number of children, marital status, origin, etc.)?
6. In your experience, do schools interact more with mothers or fathers? Why do you think this is so?
7. Do you think that the schools' actions (or actions by educational or free time resources for children/young people) in the realm of achieving a work-family balance have been successful?
8. In your opinion, what policies or measures, either public or private, would have to be taken to help families balance their jobs with their family life?

APPENDIX 4: SCRIPT OF THE PARTICIPATORY FORUM WITH EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

1. How do you think the issue of the **work-family balance is approached/included** by **educational and free time resources**?

2. Do you think that **balancing work and family is one of the most important problems** that affect children's and adolescents' education, or are there other more important problems with different roots?

3. You are part of **the field of education and free time activities**, but you also performing **care-giving** activities. Are there tensions between these two facets?

4. I will now read you some **handicaps faced by the parents** interviewed with regard to the **field of education and balancing it with work life**. Tell me what you think of them:

- * Combining work and school timetables

- * Summer vacations

- * The high cost of extracurricular services (sometimes with doubts as to their quality)

- * The lack of education, free time and public or private care-giving services at certain times of the day and certain times of the year

- * Schools and other resources first address mothers and then fathers.

5. Being in contact with families, children and teenagers, where do you think the **work-family balance situation is heading and how does it affect education and free time activities**?

6. How would you **rate** the activities, measures and projects that you have done until now under the guise of **educational and free time resources** and that have **helped** achieve a **work-family balance**?

7. What proposals do you think might be undertaken in order to **help the work-family balance within the activities** you already do or that could be created? Are there any **new actions or projects** being developed by educational and free time resources that would also help families achieve a work-family balance?