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# Economic development, family wealth and settlement of the personal life and work<sup>1</sup>

## Desarrollo económico, riqueza familiar y conciliación de la vida personal y laboral

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### Abstract<sup>2</sup>:

In the last half century, European countries have experienced an increased participation of women in the labor market, what has coincided with a decline in fertility and the emergence of a number of problems related to reconciling of personal and family with a clear female bias. The differences in the time of the use between men and women show that, although the participation of women in paid work has increased, the incorporation of men into the domestic sphere is being too slowly, so that the differences between sexes are important although shortening.

**Keywords:** Demography, fertility, reconciliation, labor market.

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### Resumen:

En el último medio siglo los países europeos han experimentado un incremento de la participación de las mujeres en el mercado de trabajo, lo que ha coincidido con una caída de la fecundidad y con la aparición de una serie de problemas relacionados con la conciliación de la vida personal y familiar con un claro sesgo femenino. Las diferencias en el empleo del tiempo entre hombres y mujeres ponen de manifiesto que, aunque aumente la participación de las mujeres en el trabajo remunerado, la incorporación del hombre a la esfera doméstica está siendo excesivamente lenta, por lo que las diferencias entre sexos, aunque se van acortando siguen siendo significativas.

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**Palabras clave:** Demografía, fecundidad, conciliación, mercado de trabajo.

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**Introduction**

Short-term visions aside, the modernization of Spanish society requires a better distribution of time and a rationalization and greater flexibility in the time spent on professional work. Given that the maturity of a society can be measured by the level of care provided to its most vulnerable members, if we accept this assumption, it can be said that Spanish society is simply engaged in a process of maturing.

This is the case because there are still important differences between how men and women manage their time, as shown by the differences in their social positions. Despite the figures revealed by the statistics, according to which more women are completing higher education and have a higher profile in social and economic life, and more men are engaged in household chores, surveys of the use of time nonetheless highlight the unequal distribution of time between men and women. The burden of family and domestic responsibilities is still mostly borne by women.

Meanwhile, the Spanish economy's loss of competitiveness is closely linked to the low productivity of each hour worked in the Spanish labour market. This is directly linked with the inefficiency of the Spanish working hour.

An increase in competitiveness and productivity requires a change in culture that replaces "presenteeism" (when the need to be seen at work rather than seen to be working effectively) in businesses for objective-based production that improves the efficiency of investment in human capital. The future of business productivity involves a streamlining and increased flexibility of the working hours which are used by employees and businesses today.

Modern society requires leaders who are able to combine empathy, enterprise and intelligence. As a result, far from requiring iron man leaders, Spanish businesses in the twenty-first century need leaders who seek to maximize corporate profits in the awareness that the people responsible for improving the performances of their profit and loss accounts are human beings, and in view of that humanity, they need to be able to use empathy and assertiveness to make legitimate business interests consistent with human beings who want a successful career that is compatible with their personal well-being and that of their family.

## 2. The concept of reconciliation

The Europe 2020 Strategy provides for a direction for action in the Member States' social and economic policies aimed at strengthening economic growth from three perspectives – it must be smart, sustainable and inclusive. If the rate of economic growth is to be inclusive, this means that the economy must achieve high levels of employment with a level of social and territorial cohesion that differs a great deal from the current situation.

Among the objectives established<sup>3</sup> by the European Strategy is that 75% of men and women between 20 and 64 years old should be employed. As well as this objective, another aim is that 40% of men and women between 30 and 34 years old should have completed higher education. Together with the basic premise of reducing poverty and social exclusion, these are the European Union's Indicators of Sustainable Development.

However, the socioeconomic conditions in Spain in 2012 are very different, as some figures show a gender gap between men and women, highlighting the differences in access to employment due to gender, far from the European objective.

In Spain, employment rates for both men and women fell between 2006 and 2010, and especially among men. In specific terms, in 2006 there was a gender gap in employment rates among the population over 16 years old of 22.4 points, although during this period this gap fell by 9.3 percentage points, to 13.1 points in 2010. In this paper, we discuss some of the reasons why women have less access to employment than men, and consider the aforementioned gender gap in depth.

The European Economic and Social Committee adopted the principle that "Everyone needs to be able (...) have a sufficient number of years of time credit for family activities (...) It should be possible for people to choose to put back their retirement age if they prefer to take time out (financed in the same way as retirement) during their working lives." (EESC Opinion (2009).

### 2.1. *Reconciliation of personal life and work schedules*

Some social progress has been made in the twenty-first century as regards the opportunity to have a personal life and develop professionally, but a great deal of work still remains to be done. This is despite the improvements that have taken place since the early twentieth century, when this possibility was not even considered.

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<sup>3</sup> European Commission (2010).

As a result, citizens are demanding that their governments implement increased and improved measures to balance their work and personal lives.

In the Spanish case, more than all the others, there is a clear need to rationalize the working day<sup>4</sup> as the Spanish custom of extending working hours, which bears more or less no relation to efficiency and productivity at work, makes it very difficult to reconcile the two spheres.

Spanish working hours in 1940 coincided with the time zone in force in Spain. However, for strategic reasons Spain joined the German initiative to impose their working hours on the rest of Europe. Nonetheless, the Order of the Presidency of the Government<sup>5</sup> pledged to "restore normal time", although to date this has never happened. As a result, in the twenty-first century Spain, a country in Western Europe, is subject to Greenwich Mean Time + 1 hour<sup>6</sup>.

This means that if the aim is to improve Spanish productivity, promote fertility and improve conditions for the reconciliation of Spaniards' personal and family life, it is necessary to conduct a reliable study of Spanish working hours in order to encourage objective-based production rather than mere presence in the workplace, and to create flexible formulas for access to employment to make caring for the family compatible with improving business efficiency. This means that more reasonable working hours would make it possible to combine successful professional development with adequate care for the families needing it most.

## 2.2. *The situation in the European Union*

Family policies in Europe do not fall within the remit of the European Union. However, it can legislate in the area of reconciliation of men and women's family and working life and can establish guidelines for improving demographic trends. How-

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<sup>4</sup> In this regard, Ignacio Buqueras points out that: "Broadly speaking, the profile of a non-reconciling boss is a male, over 50 years old, with no children or with a wife who takes care of them on an almost exclusive basis, who is disorganized, wilful, and clings to the idea that all the hours possible are not enough to finish a good job, and who has the wrong priorities in life. This profile is viewed favourably in Spain and frowned upon in Europe." (El País, Friday 25 February 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Order of 7 March 1940, on bringing forward the legal time by 60 minutes from the 16th of this month onwards. Official State Bulletin no. 68. Article 5 stipulated that: The date on which normal time is to be reestablished will be announced in due course."

<sup>6</sup> Added to this was the extensive moonlighting after the war, which forced workers to work as many hours as possible in the morning (hence Spain's two o'clock lunchtime), and to continue working until nine o'clock at night. This need to lengthen the morning means that workers need to have a coffee or a snack at noon, which is unheard of in other European countries. (*La Vanguardia*, Sunday 27 February 2011).

ever, governments should avoid adopting ideological positions and should propose broad-based mechanisms that provide individuals with the opportunity to decide to start a family and have the children they wish.

The instruments available to the European Union as the body coordinating these measures through the European Commission are the European Alliance for Families and Eurofound. Moreover, the European Economic and Social Committee recommends that the preparations for 2014 as the twentieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family focus on achieving a balance between work and family life, among other areas. At international level, it recommends the exchange of best practices and information on the development of policies relating to the family.<sup>7</sup>

Public policies to protect the family and promote equality of opportunity may encourage or discourage population growth. The following table shows the measures implemented by some of the countries with the highest and lowest fertility rates, and their administrative measures encouraging or deterring births and equal opportunities for men and women.

Europe's demographic situation is not encouraging; fertility rates have now declined to below the threshold required for generational replacement<sup>8</sup>. All countries present a significant decline in the age at first pregnancy, increased separations and single-parent households, and an increase in elderly dependents is also a common denominator within Europe. Given the decline of the extended family and the rise of the nuclear family, some very varied pro-family initiatives have been implemented by the public authorities. The following table shows some of the main measures implemented by the individual European countries:

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<sup>7</sup> Resolution 2011/29 of the European Economic and Social Committee, 28 July 2011. Report of the United Nations Secretary General. A/67/61-E 2012/3.

<sup>8</sup> No Member State reaches the threshold of simple generational replacement, which is 2.1 children per woman in the European Union. (The extra 0.1 children per woman is explained by the fact that it is necessary to compensate for the effect of higher birth rates for boys and for girls who die before reaching reproductive age). Nonetheless, there are two countries, France and Ireland, that come very close. Fertility in the United States has almost reached this threshold, while average fertility in the European Union falls short by 25%. (EESC 2011).

**Table 1**  
**European policies in favour of the family in the EU**

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Main measures</b>	<b>Results</b>
Sweden <sup>9</sup>	Parental leave Public nursery services for young children Specific tax treatment for families <sup>10</sup> Division of parental leave between the father and mother	High rate of female employment Greater involvement of fathers in childcare Fertility rates higher than the European average Reduced child poverty
Finland and Norway	Grants for childcare in the home <sup>11</sup>	
The Netherlands	Part-time working hours Tax reduction of 704 euros a month Use of childcare services compatible with part-time work Time credit.	73.2% of men and 45.9% of women work full-time 19% of fathers and 41% of mothers work part-time
France	Long-term stability in family policy Retirement and labour law systems Nurseries from birth to age three. Nursery free from three years old Financial grants and fair taxes for families favouring large families	High rates of female employment High fertility rates. Free choice of care type
United Kingdom	Fight against poverty and efficiency Non-intervention Labour market flexibility	Easy for mothers to return to the labour market after maternity leave Fertility rates of women working outside the home are half those of woman who do not
Germany	More developed nursery systems Adjusted working hours Paid parental leave of fourteen weeks at two-thirds of the salary Grants to combat child poverty	Critical demographic situation Negative social attitude towards the compatibility of motherhood and professional work outside the home

Source: Prepared by the authors based on EESC data (2011).

Most family policies implemented in the various European countries that have achieved more or less effective results can be summarized as follows:

- Tax measures and grants for families.
- Action in favour of professional equality between men and women
- Reception and care services for children and dependents

<sup>9</sup> These measures have been in force since the 1970s.

<sup>10</sup> Compulsory joint taxation was abolished in 1971.

<sup>11</sup> In force in Finland since 1988 and implemented in Norway in 1998.

- Family rights in pension insurance schemes,
- Reconciliation of family and professional life: parental leave, voluntary part-time working hours.

In some countries, levels of public spending on social welfare are very high and achieve very positive effects on increasing fertility. However, in other economies the effect of public expenditure seems to be practically non-existent in terms of achieving a population increase. It cannot therefore be concluded that an increase in social spending growth will automatically lead to a rise in fertility rates, as shown in the following table:

**Table 2**  
**Change in average per capita spending aimed at families and children**

	Change	1992	2005
Denmark	89.9%	7,657	14,542
Germany	103.6%	425	8,654
France	38.7%	439	6,087
Italy	0.4%	1,253	1,258
The Netherlands	11.4%	4,336	483
Finland	0.3%	7,163	7,183
Sweden	-34.8%	9,362	6,102
United Kingdom	-26.9%	2,779	2,032

Source: López and Badenes 2008<sup>12</sup>

The table above shows the levels of public spending per household in a series of European Union countries selected for analysis. They show that the continuous trend over a number of years in public expenditure levels in countries may be antagonistic, as far as intervention is concerned, such as in the United Kingdom and all the Scandinavian countries. Even within this group of countries, the trends vary substantially since while in Sweden social public expenditure increased substantially in the 1990s, the current trend is towards much lower levels, although the demographic results are very satisfactory. In the United Kingdom, where spending levels do not match those in Scandinavia, the trend is downward, although they have achieved very acceptable levels of population growth.

Meanwhile, France has implemented a family policy characterized by a high level of continuity and permanence regardless of political changes, combining financial

<sup>12</sup> The original table contains more countries that have not been included in this study.



benefits, a fair tax system and pension systems and paid leave. Public expenditure on the family in France has succeeded in increasing birth rates. One of the most important reasons is that the French family benefits are not subject to income earned by spouses, but are instead awarded regardless of financial status. In France, there is a positive correlation index between public family welfare spending and fertility.<sup>13</sup>

The United Kingdom provides the clearest example of ultra-liberal economic policies that have achieved positive effects on fertility and on opportunities for reconciling work and family life. This evidence shows that the fertility rate of women who do not work outside the home is almost twice that of those who combine both tasks. From the standpoint of public non-intervention by the State, Great Britain has undertaken measures aimed at labour market flexibility, such as allowing mothers to return to work after a period devoted exclusively to working in the home. Perhaps this is the key to British population growth.

In general, the Scandinavian countries have very high levels of public expenditure, with particular emphasis on equal opportunities for mothers and fathers and measures enhancing the reconciliation of work and family life. Denmark and Finland have achieved positive results in levels of population growth after the high levels of public expenditure, although their levels of labour force participation among women with dependent children are not particularly high. This is despite Finland having established a benefit for those caring for children at home since 1998.

Among the Northern European countries, Sweden has a positive correlation between welfare, women's participation in the labour market and fertility. For some years, the country has had very high levels of social welfare, combined with high levels of taxation. However, the last six years have seen a reduction in public benefits, coupled with a reduced tax effort, and none of this has changed the trend in the country's birth rate. Indeed, the opposite is true, as the upward trend continues, with fertility rates above the European average.

Finally, Holland is a country where it is not possible to establish a positive relationship between levels of social welfare and increased fertility, and yet it is the economy that uses part-time work as the basic tool for reconciliation of work and family life for fathers, and for mothers in particular.

Of all the measures taken by the various countries to encourage family stability and enhance fertility, those that allow professional development to be combined

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<sup>13</sup> López López (2008) describes a statistical correlation study which analyzes both the correlation between fertility and social welfare and between fertility and the level of female participation in the labour market, which in the French case is also positive.

with care for the family must be emphasized. In its Conventions Nos. 156 and 183, concerning the balance between work and family life, the International Labour Organization encourages both governments and the private sector to promote parental involvement in the care of their children, reinforce provisions for parental leave, and extend flexible working arrangements and part-time work for workers with family responsibilities.

The European demographic figures show that there are vast contrasts in the different European states. Eighteen states have a positive natural balance, while deaths outnumber births in nine. In ascending order; Portugal, Estonia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Germany show negative natural growth balances (EESC 2011).

For all the reasons mentioned in the preceding pages, the factors for success of family policies can be summarized as follows:

- Sustainability of the policies applied, regardless of political changes.
- The universality of the measures for dependent children is another key factor, which is not incompatible with a progressive policy based on the beneficiaries' income.
- Recognition of the family and appreciation of its role and family success.
- Consideration of the specific situation of large families.
- The importance of two policies: those concerning employment and housing. A high rate of youth unemployment or unstable contracts affect generational replacement levels.
- According to the Survey carried out on 11,000 mothers by the World Movement of Mothers: mothers want the following measures to be promoted:
  1. Reconciliation of work and family life.
  2. Recognition by society of the importance of their role as mothers.
  3. More time to spend with their children.

### **3. Differences between men and women in the use of time**

We are all part of a family, as no one is born as a result of spontaneous generation. The family is the most highly valued institution by everyone, and there is complete unanimity in this. However, empirical comparison of the data highlights the need to improve the quality of public policies protecting the family. By way of an example, a recent study shows that 26% of children aged between 6 and 11 years old and 19% of those between 11 and 14 years old feel lonely at home. Moreover, the same poll found that 17% of children who spend all morning at school do not see their parents in the afternoon, and 3% of the children surveyed have dinner without their father or mother being present (SM Foundation 2010).

It is therefore vital to consider that despite the importance attributed to the family by Spaniards and Europeans, it is essential to take effective public measures for protecting citizens within their families, and to promote policies that make commitment to care and attention for the most vulnerable family members compatible with opportunities for successful careers for the spouses.

### 3.1. *The feminization of childcare*: The case of Erik Ullenhag

The new socioeconomic models present in Spanish families have merely aggravated the differences between men and women. The massive incorporation of women into the labour market has been a decisive factor in Spain's social, cultural, economic and demographic change. Economic independence has led to an increase in autonomous decision-making. However, this change has not been accompanied by a corresponding increase in male responsibility or in men's participation in domestic decision-making and responsibilities. Whether this is the primary cause or just one of them, the demographic data show that women are demanding increased and more effective measures to enable them to reconcile their professional development with caring for their families, because otherwise birth rates will remain at levels that do not guarantee generational replacement.

The rate of labour market participation among women has increased substantially, and more than 57% of births are to women who are active in the labour market. There have been two significant changes in the female employment rate: first, the peak in the employment rate (at more than 80%) is shifting to the age group between 25 to 29 years old, and this percentage does not fall in the following age groups, which shows a clear desire among women to remain in the labour market throughout their entire life cycle (CES 2012).

Today, married women are mostly responsible for the care of children and dependent relatives, and this situation is mainly determined by two variables:

- a. First, the trade-off of work-leisure by married women that maximizes their utility is determined by the level of other family members' income. The spouse's income is particularly important in terms of the probability of a woman rejoining the labour market.
- b. Second, the age of younger children works against the inclusion of women in the labour market. In the United States between 1991 and 1997, the observed probability of participation in the labour market increased by 7% and the years of education of the youngest child increased by 8.3% (Falzone 2011).

A striking case, due to being outside the common European average, is the so-called "superdad minister", Erik Ullenhag, Swedish Minister for Integration, who

was given that nickname by the press as a result of becoming the symbol of conciliation, or rather of reconciliation. Based on the assumption that planning is the key to success, the 38-year-old father reconciles caring for his two children aged six and two years old with his work in the Swedish government, while his wife lives and works in Jerusalem. In addition to the essential consideration of effective organization of his work, the young Swedish minister revealed that the basic factors in achieving the reconciliation of the two tasks were flexible working hours, a full commitment to his family during his leisure and free time, the help of his parents and a surprising degree of social benevolence when it is the man who cares for the family on an almost exclusive basis, even in a tolerant and open society like Sweden.

### *3.2. Male commitment and female commitment*

This would not be such a high profile media story if both men and women devoted equal time to household tasks. However, in reality family responsibilities are borne primarily by women. The Spanish situation can be analyzed from the perspective of the National Statistics Institute's Survey on Time Use in 2002 and 2010, in which the data showed no significant differences in the eight-year period.

**Table 3**  
**Survey on Time Use**

		2009-2010	2002-2003
<b>Both sexes</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22h 53'</b>	<b>22h 55'</b>
	Personal care	11h 29'	11h 22'
	Home and family	3h 0'	2h 57'
	Studies	0h 39'	0h 42'
	Paid work	2h 47'	3h 0'
	Free time	4h 57'	4h 53'
<b>Women</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22h 53'</b>	<b>22h 51'</b>
	Personal care	11h 26'	11h 21'
	Home and family	4h 7'	4h 24'
	Studies	0h 39'	0h 43'
	Paid work	2h 9'	1h 57'
	Free time	4h 32'	4h 26'
<b>Men</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22h 54'</b>	<b>23h 0'</b>
	Personal care	11h 33'	11h 24'
	Home and family	1h 54'	1h 30'
	Studies	0h 39'	0h 42'
	Paid work	3h 25'	4h 4'
	Free time	5h 23'	5h 20'

SOURCE: Time Use Survey. INE (Instituto Nacional de Estadística - Spanish National Institute of Statistics).

N.B.: The data show the average daily duration of time spent on each of the variables, with a result of more than 24 hours possible due to activities overlapping.

In this period of time between 2003 and 2010, the time spent in paid work decreased by 5%, which may be indicative of the situation of unemployment in which many Spaniards find themselves. However, the differences between men and women continue to be significant. There is a very large divergence in the time spent on paid work by men and women, with a difference of more than 10 points separating them in 2010.

Participation in household tasks is consistent with these results, and is predominantly female. Despite the increase in male involvement in home and family activities by nearly five points, and the decline in the percentage of women doing house-

work, there is still a difference of 17 points between men and women engaged in unpaid work - 74.7% of men compared to 91.9% of women.

In view of the existence and consolidation of the differences between men and women in terms of work outside the home and family responsibilities, men are clearly in a better position than women when entering the labour market. Furthermore, when the need arises for one partner to leave the labour market to care for the family, it is mostly women rather than men who do so, due to an ineffective or non-existent policy of conciliation. Women therefore encounter greater obstacles when returning to an inflexible labour market.

#### **4. Access to the labour market and leaving it for family reasons**

The aforementioned gender gap in terms of access to employment is not something that is exclusive to the Spanish economy, but is in fact present in all countries. In specific terms, in the European Union this gap for the population between 15 and 64 years old was 14.2 points in 2006, and fell to 11.9 points in 2010. For the population aged between 20 and 64 years old, the gender gap in the same year was 13.0 points and fell to 12.6 points if the reference population was in the age range between 25 and 64 years old, and rose to 16 points if the population was between 55 and 64 years old.

As can be seen, there are clear differences between men and women in terms of access to employment, and they receive different treatment with regard to paid leave in the different countries.

##### *4.1. Paid leave - a comparative perspective*

If we attempt to analyze the level of effectiveness of public family policies, one of the basic points to consider is the legal issues around parental leave in each of the reference countries. To that end, based on data provided by the World Bank, the following table lists some of the leave periods recognized in each of the countries studied.

**Table 4**  
**Family benefits**

	Can pregnant or breastfeeding women work the same hours as other workers?	Legal minimum paid maternity/ paternity leave		Percentage of salary paid during the leave <sup>14</sup>	
		Maternity	Paternity	Maternity	Paternity
Germany	NO	98	0 (360 parental)	100%	0% (partially)
Denmark	YES	126	14 (224 parental)	50%	36% (partially)
France	YES	112	11	100%	100%
Italy	NO	150	0 (300 parental)	80%	0% (partially)
The Netherlands	NO	112	2	100%	100%
Finland	YES	147	25.2 (221.2 parental)	25%	25% (partially)
Sweden	YES	480 (parental)	10	0%	80% (partially)
United Kingdom	YES	273	14	25%	17%
Spain	YES	112	13	100%	100%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on World Bank data (2011).

It is clear that in countries where birth rates are comparatively higher than the European average, such as Sweden, the number of days of maternity leave is substantially larger than elsewhere in Europe. The situation is similar in the United Kingdom, where birth rates have increased and 273 days of maternity leave are granted. In both cases, the remuneration compared to salary is very low or even zero, while there are other types of maternity benefits in Sweden.

Only Finland exceeds the EU average for paternity leave, while Germany and Italy are at the opposite end of the scale, and grant not a single day of paid leave to fathers upon the birth of a child.

#### 4.2. *Special reference to the Spanish case*

Workers in Spain can request leave to care for children or minors in foster care or to care for other family members. In this case, the duration of the period considered effective contribution depends on the circumstances provided by the General Social

<sup>14</sup> In Denmark, the Government pays 50% during maternity leave and 100% during paternity leave. In Finland, the government pays 100% of both leaves, as it does in France, Sweden, Spain and Italy. In Germany, maternity leave is paid by the employer and the government, and paternity leave is paid by the Government. In the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, maternity leave is paid by the Government and paternity leave by the employer.

Security Law, as amended by the entry into force of the Equality Law, which broadened the scope and duration of this provision.

### Leave of absence for childcare

	TOTAL	% mothers
2000	8,339	96.02
2001	10,163	96.43
2002	12,694	96.16
2003	13,879	96.38
2004	16,963	96.34
2005	18,942	95.23
2006	20,225	95.33
2007	32,983	94.06
2008	28,724	94.40
2009	33,942	95.90

Source: General Social Security Treasury 2009.

There were 9,411 instances of leave of absence due to family care in the first quarter of 2010, of which 8,847 were for applications from women and 564 from men. In the same period in 2009, there were 9,349 instances, of which 8,845 were for women and 504 for men.

As can be seen, the trend is consistent throughout all the years in the series, with women being responsible for most of the applications for leave of absence to care for relatives.

Although the Act provides for the possibility that both men and women may have access to both maternity leave and leave for care of a relative, the facts are compelling, and there is still a ceiling that has to be broken by men with their professional careers so that they can enjoy these rights at the specific times when it is necessary, as women do. It is true that one of the determining factors in this situation may be the loss of purchasing power. If a man earns a much higher salary than his wife, they will obviously decide that she rather than he should leave her job. However, equal salaries among men and women are increasingly common because their professional categories are very similar, and it is therefore necessary to end this cultural barrier that prevents men from applying for the necessary leave.



#### 4.3. Correlation between female work and fertility rates

In recent years, it has been very common to identify low fertility rates with high levels of female employment, and as such population decline has been attributed to the massive entry of women into the labour market. However, there is no statistical evidence for this overall perspective if the figures are considered comparatively, as in some European countries motherhood of several children is reconciled with high levels of female employment.

At the other extreme, it is apparent that in some countries motherhood is a reason for women leaving the labour market, especially after the third child, while the third child's birth does not affect the degree of employability among men in most cases.

Table 4  
**Incompatibility of female labour and high fertility levels**  
**Employment rate according to the number of children under 12 years old**

	Women	20 to 49	Years	Men	20 to 49	Years	Gross birth rate
	One child	Two children	Three or more	One child	Two children	Three or more	
E.U. 25	64.8	57.8	41.2	91.4	92.3	86.1	10.9
Belgium	70.4	69.5	49.2	91.5	93.4	87.1	11.7
Czech Republic	61.4	45.4	22.0	95.0	94.8	84.5	11.5
<b>Denmark</b>	<b>80.3</b>	<b>82.2</b>	<b>67.2</b>	<b>93.6</b>	<b>93.7</b>	<b>89.1</b>	<b>11.8</b>
Germany	66.0	55.2	37.9	89.8	90.7	85.0	8.3
Estonia	66.1	59.8	39.1	91.5	90.9	89.4	12
Greece	54.2	52.8	39.6	96.3	96.9	95.2	10.5
Spain	53.8	47.5	41.3	92.8	93.9	88.2	11.4
France	73.3	63.8	39.8	91.7	92.0	87.3	12.9
Italy	52.7	45.8	35.0	94.1	94.1	91.4	9.6
<b>Cyprus</b>	<b>72.9</b>	<b>71.5</b>	<b>51.6</b>	<b>94.7</b>	<b>98.1</b>	<b>93.4</b>	<b>11.6</b>
Latvia	69.5	61.6	50.6	89.3	91.8	89.1	10.6
<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>81.3</b>	<b>76.8</b>	<b>58.9</b>	<b>87.8</b>	<b>90.5</b>	<b>79.7</b>	<b>10.4</b>
Luxembourg	68.8	53.0	34.7	96.7	96.8	96.0	11.5
Hungary	59.4	43.8	12.6	87.7	87.7	73.8	9.9
<b>Slovenia</b>	<b>85.6</b>	<b>85.4</b>	<b>81.8</b>	<b>94.0</b>	<b>94.8</b>	<b>93.8</b>	<b>10.8</b>
Finland	75.0	74.4	56.2	91.5	93.1	93.2	11.2

Source: Prepared by the author based on data from López López 2006 and Eurostat 2008.

The above table shows two groups of countries in which women's access to the labour market is perfectly compatible with motherhood, and even motherhood of three or more children, which is compatible with high rates of employment among men. Cyprus, Lithuania, Denmark and Slovenia are four examples of economies in which motherhood does not lead to women's departure from the workplace en masse, although the birth of the third child leads to a substantial decline in the rate of female participation in Cyprus and Lithuania. On the other hand, the fertility rates in the benchmark year of 2008 were above the European Union-25 average in both Cyprus and Denmark.

At the opposite extreme are Greece, Italy and Spain, where except for the latter, the EU average birth rate was not exceeded in the year studied, and in all three countries, it is very difficult to combine high rates of female employment with birth rates, while the birth of children does not affect male employment.

## 5. Conclusions

The European experience shows that if governments implement measures facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life, high rates of female employment are clearly compatible with high fertility rates. This means that the work of the public authorities is highly effective if it is continuous over time, regardless of political changes.

Public investment in family policies not only benefits current generations, but also has a positive impact on the future as the so-called gerontogrowth (the trend towards an increase in the number of older people) combined with a decline in the active population –despite the rise in the retirement age– and the decline in the employed population, due to an economic and employment crisis, may lead to financial, social and political stagnation, which could be prevented with an adequate family policy. Without wishing to present a catastrophic vision of a demographic winter, the fact is that a responsible social and demographic policy must take into account the effects that current public spending will have on future generations.

At present, family responsibilities are still primarily borne by mothers in most cases, so that when one of the two partners has to leave the labour market to take care of some family responsibility, in most cases it is mothers who do so. Empirical experience in the Spanish case shows that this situation is due to fathers being the main breadwinners and women therefore leave the labour market in order to avoid a significant reduction in the family's purchasing power.

In addition, an analysis of the uses of time by men and women also confirms that family responsibilities are completely feminized.

- Because of their social importance, decisions about motherhood pertaining to the private sphere must be considered when designing public policies.
- The decline in fertility rates and birth rates is causing serious damage in Western societies.
- Women would like to have more children than they have, and are calling for more help to do so.
- Equal treatment is theoretically sought, but currently does not exist.
- Domestic legislation may violate individual freedom, but equal treatment will only become effective with equal distribution of family responsibilities.

If governments are interested in implementing effective policies designed to foster a balance between work and family life, one of the basic points is to promote a balanced distribution of household tasks, in order to contribute to gender equality. Today, both men and women contribute financially to their household or family, while it is true that men mostly receive higher salaries. This does not preclude a modern family and social policy that encourages, recognizes and supports the work of family care and dedication done by men. More programmes and more strategies are required to promote men's participation in the various phases of family life.

The economic crisis is affecting the conditions of family life and during this time of crisis, the family is simultaneously a key factor in cushioning the negative effects of economic depression. This should not lead governments to postpone effective and efficient policies for protection of the family, as many policies which improve the welfare of individuals living within a family can be implemented at no cost. The impact of the economic crisis is being felt primarily in income and employment, and the role of families is still essential, which means that it is necessary to seek recognition of this situation from states and supranational institutions.

The profound crisis in public finances must not be a barrier that slows down family policies, as it is possible to carry out broad-based monitoring of family policy and its impact. Measures for training, housing, public transport, energy, welfare, education and employment, all of which can and should have a bias towards the family, need not necessarily result in increased investment or spending, but in more effective public spending. However, to achieve this it is essential to carry out an assessment of the effectiveness of public spending on social welfare.

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