

III. Work-family policies: The missing link to more and quality jobs for women

A job that prevents workers from balancing their work commitments with the need to care for their family members is not a decent job; added to which, the unresolved tensions between care and work represent a major concern for women at work and affect their access to good quality work. A 2015 poll of more than 9,500 women in the G20 countries found that work-family balance was the top work-related issue for women, flagged as such by 44 per cent of the respondents. Equal pay and harassment came in as the second and the third respectively (Ipsos MORI, 2015). In a 2015 ILO survey of 1,300 private sector companies in 39 developing countries, the greater burden of family responsibilities borne by women than by men was ranked as the number one barrier to women's leadership (ILO, 2015g).

As shown in Part One, unpaid household and care work falls disproportionately on women. This unequal distribution of family responsibilities between women and men, and more broadly also between families, on the one hand, and the public sector, markets and the non-for-profit sector (in the formal and informal economy), on the other hand, contributes to a wide array of labour market inequalities. It leads to lower female labour force participation rates, higher levels of sectoral and occupational segregation, and the higher uptake of involuntary part-time work for women, in addition to wage and income disparities. The unequal share of unpaid care work may also result in direct or indirect discrimination and tensions between work, family responsibilities and private life, which are detrimental to individual and collective well-being.

In particular, the lack of adequate paid parental leave, good quality, affordable and accessible childcare and other social care services for family members, and also of family-friendly flexible working arrangements pushes women, who are often lower paid than their male counterparts, to leave the labour market either temporarily or permanently. Long working hours, schedule inflexibility and unpredictability are significant sources of work-family conflict. As demonstrated in Chapter II above, the long working hour culture in certain occupations may result in women quitting work altogether. Even after a short break, it may be difficult for women to continue working without suffering a penalty (Aisenbrey et al., 2009). For instance, in a 2014 poll conducted in the United States, 61 per cent of women said that they were not working because of family responsibilities. Three quarters of homemakers would consider working if they could work flexible hours or from home (Cain Miller and Alderman, 2014).

Some women may accept occupational downgrading in order to work reduced hours to meet family responsibilities. In Spain, in 2012, following their departure on leave, all the men returned to full-time jobs, as opposed to only 55 per cent of women, 35 per cent of whom returned to part-time work or took part-time leave and 7 per cent of whom gave up paid work altogether or lost their jobs (3 per cent) (Escobedo and Meil, 2013). As shown in Chapter II, the acceptance of part-time employment remains an issue since part-timers, who are predominantly women, suffer a wage penalty and have less access to social protection than full-time workers. In addition, part-time jobs are usually of poor quality and confined to a limited number of sectors and occupations.

The absence of an effective support system for mothers and fathers could mean that young women may choose to enter certain sectors and occupations, including in the informal economy, that are more compatible with care responsibilities (Cassirer and Addati, 2007). In Thailand, home-based workers cited the ability to combine paid work and childcare and other family responsibilities as a significant benefit of home-based work (Horn et al., 2013). In Malaysia, women who held jobs in low-skilled employment in the manufacturing or services sector chose, after having children, to start their own micro-businesses rather than return to formal work, even if their children were old enough for school. Although one of the reasons cited by women for starting a micro-business was to be economically independent, many women opened a business location close to their homes in order to meet their family responsibilities (Franck, 2011).

For women working full-time, the larger care responsibilities also have an impact on income, career progression and status at retirement. They are less likely to be able to put in longer hours, more likely to take leave for the provision of care and sick leave for family reasons and to take career breaks to care for small children. This affects their earnings. According to a McKinsey survey in Latin America, 52 per cent of women said that seeking more time with their families was the main reason why they voluntarily gave up their jobs in midcareer or even when they had reached senior levels. The risk of falling into poverty in old age is also greater for women than men (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015). As social security systems are based on continuous remunerated employment, women are less likely to fulfil the minimum contributory requirements, because of work interruptions due to the need to provide unpaid care, and thus denied access to adequate old-age pensions (ILO, 2009).