



Coordinated by the Confederation of Family Organisations of the European Union.

## **Men and families** **Men's changing family roles in Europe**

### **Summary and recommendations**

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#### **European Commission**



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#### **Partners**

- Ligue des Familles, Belgium
- Pancyprian Organisation Polyteknon, Cyprus
- Vaestöliitto ry (The Family Federation of Finland), Finland
- Union Nationale des Associations Familiales, France
- Family and Child Care Center, Greece
- Unione Famiglie Handicappati, Italy
- Liga Portuguesa dos Deficientes Motores-CRS, Portugal
  
- Institut pour l'Egalité des Femmes et des Hommes, Belgium

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## **Preface**

This brochure contains the Summary and Recommendations of a fifteen-month European project run by COFACE and seven of its member organisations, in conjunction with the Belgian Institute for Gender Equality. The project, which received financial support from the European Commission and the Institute, falls under the European gender equality programme<sup>1</sup>.

The project groundwork, done in spring 2005, identified two broad key objectives: to build awareness about men's family roles among the different political, economic, social and cultural actors and the public, and to address a series of questions including, How do men perceive their own roles in the family? How do we encourage fathers to engage more with caring for, educating and raising their children? How can gender equality take root in families to ensure a harmoniously working partnership of their members?

These objectives would not only result in a year and a half's partnership work and surveys, but also a Seminar in Helsinki in October 2006 and the writing of this booklet, which is available in 8 languages.

Initially, the objectives set suggested that the project's main focus would be on men's role in the family in fairly narrow terms. This approach, however, quickly proved too restrictive.

Examining men's role in the family effectively means having to look at the organisation of society in general, and particularly at the huge influence of stereotypes and resistance to change in the matter, through a critical prism. It is not just men's role that is in question, but that of women, too. And not just in the family, but also in the workplace, in the classroom, and elsewhere.

We were evidently mindful of running two kinds of risk: one would be simply reporting and rehashing a few already well-rehearsed generalities which would in no way inform the debate, still less contribute to solutions for greater equality between women and men; the other would be merely to survey established provision in the different countries in the hope that merely listing and circulating these measures in the name of an exchange of good practise would act as a catalyst for guidance and implementation in other countries.

We wanted to do more. We asked each partner to inquire as to how the men and women interviewed saw men's role in the family, and what laws or other measures were needed for men to engage more with their family responsibilities.

We wanted to set the survey replies back in their political, economic and social contexts so as to position the project within the most meaningful possible framework.

The recommendations made in this brochure come not only out of research and analysis, but are also based on data gathered in the mainly qualitative surveys done by the partners.

Thanks are due to all the member organisations in the partnership for their invaluable

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<sup>1</sup> The project's full title is, "The different facets of men's role in European families. Surveys and awareness-raising measures to promote Equality between Women and Men".

collaboration and work, and a particular acknowledgement goes to our expert, Ghislaine Julémont, for her sterling work in compiling the information, and her analysis and summary of the survey results.

To my mind, the outstanding quality of the resulting recommendations is that they are founded in the realities of people's family and working lives, which makes them that much more applicable in practice ... if our local, regional, national and European policy-makers have the commitment to make it happen.

That, of course, is what we hope to achieve with the publication of this brochure.

Yves Roland-Gosselin  
Chairman of COFACE

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**Men's changing family roles in Europe**  
**Summary and recommendations**

## 1. Introduction

Action-oriented research on men's participation in parental and family responsibilities was done by COFACE in partnership with the Belgian federal Institute for gender equality and in conjunction with seven family associations each from a different European Union Member State. The seven countries concerned - Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, and Portugal - are not only exemplars of the various stages in the shaping of Europe, but also of its different constituent cultures, whose influence is particularly important in shaping the collective perceptions of women's and men's roles within the family and all structures of society. These gender stereotypes propagated through each country's specific social norms are hugely important when addressing "the role of men in the promotion of gender equality, in particular, the role of men and fathers in the reconciliation of work life and private life", in the words of the European Commission's call for proposals within which this research falls.

The Commission has long evinced an interest in men's role in the family. Concerns about the future role of fathers in the family had been voiced as far back as the 1994 celebration of the International Year of the Family. The key issue then was the lack of institutional support for fatherhood and factors holding back the development of both men's and women's family roles. It remains a live issue in 2006. Very few women and men - whether among the lay public, policy-makers, civil servants, trade unionists, employers or in civil society - have yet come to a full awareness that men's engagement with the family throws the gender-based hierarchy established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in democratic states and modern industrial societies more fundamentally into question than women's growing labour force participation.

Women's engagement with employed work ties in with the same approach of access to full citizenship inherent to the democratic system as that followed by other discriminated groups, whether minority (e.g., ethnic or religious minorities) or minoritized (e.g., colonised peoples), to secure access to the full array of fundamental human rights (in this case, the rights to work and to employment, education and vocational training, an income and social security). Their action, like that of any bid for empowerment, has immediate visibility since it takes place in the public sphere.

Men's involvement in family work, by contrast, does not inherently tie into the same social value-claiming process. It is an accepted fact that the gendered construct of work which has prevailed since the emergence of industrial society only acknowledges value to the production of marketable goods and services. The success of a policy to reconcile<sup>2</sup> work and family life aimed at improving men's participation in household and family duties, which are invisible by definition and valueless within the framework of this specific construct of work, will therefore broadly depend on throwing into question the status-ranking of employed work and family work which is one of the most visible signs of the genderized status-ranking system.

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<sup>2</sup> The word *reconcile/reconciliation* signifies that, far from being two separate and opposing spheres with diverging interests, work and the family are actually two complementary and increasingly intermingling spheres of life as they previously were in our countries before the industrial era. The point is, therefore, to promote a reconciliation of the interests of the two artificially separated spheres of life by reorganising society in line with the principle of universality rather than the now-outworn gender division of roles, and by synchronising social and family times.

From this viewpoint, men's performance of household and family tasks is arguably much more "revolutionary" in terms of changing established norms and values than women's involvement in employed work. This is because, while women's integration into the labour market reinforces the 19<sup>th</sup> century status-ranking between employed work and family work, the attempt to increase men's involvement in household and family duties raises questions about the relevance of perpetuating that status-ranking which values (traditionally male) work roles over (traditionally female) family roles.

It is clear that the gender equality objective set by the *Roadmap 2006-2010* adopted by the European Commission can be achieved only by [recognizing the same value to both types of roles](#), and a [radical restructuring of paid work](#). Blending family time into the organisation of working time, and more generally the organisation of social time, is arguably a key part of that restructuring. All the evidence suggests that no significant change can be hoped for in men's take-up of parental and family responsibilities while ever spending time with the family is equated to a loss of human capital with that is damaging to careers and employers' views of workers' employability.

## **2. Some significant results**

The overarching aim of the surveys done by the seven partner associations in the research was to clarify men's attitudes to their roles in the family. How far are they ready to share in the family responsibilities towards their children (Belgium, Cyprus, France, Finland), dependent elderly relatives (France, Greece), and to square these with their (actual or perceived) work obligations? How far, too, are they ready to engage more with family life to care for a disabled or seriously ill child (Italy, Portugal)? How do they cope with childcare arrangements in the event of split custody following a divorce or relationship breakdown (Belgium), when recent Belgian research has shown that fulfilling parental responsibilities has even greater negative career impacts for men than for women?

[Re-characterizing the father stereotype](#) is arguably the most decisive factor in bringing about the attitudinal change needed to move men's and women's family roles forward. This is the primary conclusion that emerges from the replies received to the two questions that were common to the seven surveys - what is needed to increase men's participation in daily family responsibilities? and what policies need to be implemented to improve that participation? Neither question was so worded as in any way to prompt replies in favour of men's participation as fathers in family life. And yet all the replies focused on men's child-rearing and -caring roles, although in two cases, the subject-matter of the survey was focused solely on what role they do or could play as the son of dependent elderly parents.

The focusing of replies on the father's roles in relation to his children is supremely indicative of the general establishment of the nuclear family model, which in the collective perception consists of and is limited to parents and children. But, it also emphasizes the need for change to come about in the gender allocation of family roles within this model first of all, if that change is to take root and become the norm. The likelihood is that severing the exclusive link established between the role of care provider and motherhood by associating that role with fatherhood will suffice in and of itself to bring about attitudinal and behavioural changes towards men acting as caregivers to dependent elderly parents and more broadly any other dependent family member.

As yet, however, the attitudinal change that predicates this development is not close to happening, although it may occasionally be glimpsed on the horizon, as shown by the moves towards it observable chiefly in Finland. Too many men still rely on women to do the work in the home and for the family, and few willingly help with it. At a microsocial level, the main obstacles to progress clearly seem to be a [failure of couples to talk to one another](#), and the [resistance of both to change](#). The age-old division of tasks is arguably still perceived by many as intrinsic to the affirmation of their respective gendered identities.

A number of contextual factors are also in play, including:

- [persistent gender-unequal pay](#), and more broadly, [employment conditions](#) (a 15% pay gap EU-wide)
- [labour market segregation resulting from a lack of any gender balance in school courses](#), particularly the most high-value and innovative where boys predominate, and in options that train for the personal social service professions, which are female-dominated;
- the [interest-based sectionalism of the main economic and social actors](#);
- [workplace atmospheres](#) and the career risks from taking family responsibility career breaks;
- a form of [work organisation](#) and [parental and family leave policies that do not match families' real needs](#);
- a [lack of essential family services](#) to enable both spouses or partners to also engage with employed work;
- [gender stereotypes](#) perpetuated through the educational system, but also in the media, etc.

That all these things work against the desired attitudinal change is borne out by the replies to the second common question. The entrenched inelasticity of male attitudes to work compared to family responsibilities can only possibly be overcome if the reconciliation of work and family life becomes a cross-cutting aspect of all policies that impinge on labour and social law. Mainstreaming this new imperative is given added importance by the fact that [taking family time into account in the organisation of working time increasingly seems to be the prerequisite for successful implementation of the gender equality principle](#). For that to happen, however, [the concept of reconciling work and family life needs to be rethought in universal terms, i.e., in terms that embrace both men's and women's wants and needs, not just those of women, as has too often been the case so far](#). These universal terms can only come about from balancing men's and women's needs and wants in terms of time for family life.

Women's demands are long-established, those of men still near non-existent. Not being generally driven to put their views on the matter in the public arena, they have not yet coalesced into organized lobbies pushing a coherent programme of clear and specific demands aimed at getting their [right as a parent](#) to play an effective part in parental (and family) responsibilities included in the public policy agenda, as well as in company and union policies.

Men's awakening to their role as protagonists in the desired social changes in the family sphere - which can only come about from the implementation of strict equality in employment - increasingly seems to be the missing link which is the stumbling block to achieving gender equality in all structures of society.

Where families specifically are concerned, men must realise that the future of equality in the family depends first and foremost on them, their commitment and ability to negotiate and socially impose the legitimacy of their presence in the home to look after and take care of their children or other dependent family members. Lone-parent fathers who have to contend with this situation could help spearhead change in this respect.

### **3. Conclusions and recommendations**

Even accepting that - as a group of Finnish fathers says in so many words - society, and hence the state, should not interfere in the family sphere, whose arrangements are a matter of private choices, the state may nevertheless have a duty to implement policies designed to create an enabling framework for substantive - not merely paper - equality between the rights recognised to men and women alike.

Engineering real equality between men's and women's rights cannot stop short at the workplace and public sphere, however essential that may be. It must also extend to the private sphere where the family holds pride of place, failing which the existing gender inequalities will be perpetuated indefinitely. It is, therefore, less about direct state intervention through compulsion in the internal organization of families and couples' decisions about caring for children and other dependent family members, and more about putting in place the conditions that are apt to alter the existing balances of power - generally adverse to women - that shape or play into these decisions. The final decision must lie with couples, but must be able to be taken in optimal conditions for gender equality.

#### ***Six spheres of public policy action***

Most respondents in the seven surveys felt that **collective solutions** were more apt to create an enabling framework for achieving the egalitarian family model in practice than individual measures, be it in terms of social security rights and employment conditions, taking family time into account in the organisation of working time, education and vocational training, or services essential to families.

The overarching importance assigned to changing contextual factors in order to transform gender relations runs somewhat counter to an idea that has been extremely widespread since the 1990s that gender equality in the family would promote women's sustainable and ongoing labour force participation, seen as decisive to achieving gender equality in employment. In line with the conclusions of other research, the respondents turn this relationship around, singling out all aspects of gender equality in employment and institutional responses to workers' needs for time to discharge their parental and family responsibilities as the primary determinants of gender equality in the family.

Six broad spheres of public policy action can be elicited from the replies received. In order, they are gender equality in employment, family service provision, flexible working hours



and, more especially, parental and family leave, education and training, information and the social organisation of time. To this should be added the [individualisation of social security rights and tax law](#), both of which have a positive impact on women's absorption into employment. The recommendations put forward at the COFACE Seminar held on 4 October 2006 in Helsinki in conjunction with the Finnish family association Vaestoliito received broad support from the partner associations in the research. Although not necessarily groundbreaking, the recommendations taken up do emphasize the need to implement a package of measures to ensure the success of a male-inclusive policy of reconciling work and family life.

### ***3.1. Gender equality in employment***

By any reckoning, the first sphere of action is the labour market and work organization.

- equal pay
- equality employment status
- equal conditions of employment

To many, equal pay is the precondition for a fairer redistribution of parental and family roles between women and men and, hence men's greater engagement with family life. While equal pay is certainly a requirement, it alone will not deliver the aim of gender equality in employment, which depends above all on levelling up all conditions of employment and eradicating discriminatory employment statuses.

It should not be assumed, however, that once achieved in practice, gender equality in employment (however symbolic it may be) will automatically bring about a fairer distribution of domestic and family tasks within individual couples. Gender equality in employment, and, more particularly, equal pay achieved on a collective scale will only fully induce change in couples where the pay of both is (approximately) equal. Nothing will ever be able to prevent the [pay differential](#) from working against the lower-paid one in couples' decisions. The best that can be hoped for is that where there are arguable grounds for a pay gap, it will stop being almost automatically to women's disadvantage as it is at present.

- **policing implementation of the gender equality in employment principle in the workplace**

Policing implementation of the gender equality in employment principle in the workplace is where the European and national policies so far pursued to put an end to pay discrimination mainly fall down. Leaving aside the relief available from the European Court of Justice or national courts where the principle is flouted, really effective policing mechanisms are few and far between.

But there is no general consensus that employers who flout the law should be punished. While acknowledging their potential greater effectiveness than other measures, the ostensible difficulty of designing and implementing them leaves little enthusiasm for penalties. Although not provided for, measures to promote the implementation of gender equality in employment have been suggested. They relate to:

- [job assessment and classification](#) to implement equal pay for work of equal value.

Such procedures must also be applied at workplace level.

- [carrying out an external audit](#) to verify that the principle of gender equality in employment is being implemented company-wide. Businesses found to be flouting the principle would be given a deadline to put themselves in order.
- [establishing a gender equality in employment quality mark or merit award to reward good practices](#) developed by companies, government agencies or voluntary organizations that make a substantiated application to and are approved by a certification body. [Such rewards would be widely publicised to spread information on the good practices in place and encourage their take-up by other concerns.](#)

The effectiveness of these measures in terms of progress towards gender equality in employment would need to be assessed in order to be adapted, or even replaced if no change was evidenced.

- [participation by the social partners](#)
- [right to respect for private life at work](#)

For gender equality in employment to stop being a paper right and become a reality, simply passing legislation and implementing action programmes or policing procedures - however important that may be - is not enough, especially if they are not worked out in cooperation with the social partners. The European Commission should therefore encourage them to take part in working out conditions and procedures for applying the gender equality in employment principle in the workplace. It should also urge them to get the [right to respect for private and family life](#) in the workplace - which is enshrined in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union - [included in labour law](#)

- [prohibition of discrimination by family circumstances](#)

The public authorities should also make discrimination by family circumstances a statutorily-prohibited or even unconstitutional form of discrimination that can be attacked in the courts.

Parental and family responsibilities are big factors in gender-based discrimination against women in employment, vocational training and promotion. Were men to be actively involved as caregivers to children or other dependent family members, then outlawing gender discrimination would no longer be enough to protect (existing or potential) working parents against these kinds of discrimination which would be gender-blind. Such protection could be assured only by prohibiting discrimination by family circumstances, if working parents are not to be automatically seen as less employable and less reliable than workers with no parental or family obligations.

- [economic growth](#)
- [employment growth](#)

Gender equality in employment is also determined by other non-workplace-related factors. One of the most frequently cited is employment-led economic growth as a driver of women's absorption into employment.

The evidence of the Swedish equality policy in place for over thirty years is that gender equality in employment is easier to achieve in economic growth cycles than in times of recession. A specific recommendation is to implement policies or action plans that promote employment-led economic growth in order to deliver the employment objectives laid down in the Lisbon Strategy adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2000.

- desegregation of the labour market

The segregation of the labour market, which is a consequence of the lack of any real gender balance in school options, remains an essential element of the gender equality gap in employment. The European Commission should encourage Member States to develop policies that promote gender balance in school courses. Such policies should not stop short at encouraging girls to enter innovative, employment growth industries where they are currently under-represented, but should also concentrate on guiding boys towards the care and education professions, particularly childcare for preschool children, and the helping and personal care professions. Their representation in these specific professions is no less vital an issue for gender equality than diversifying career guidance for girls and their entry into highly technically-skilled professions.

### ***3.2. Family service provision***

The development of services to families is a key flanking measure for achieving practical gender equality in employment. Arguably, they are also conducive to men's increased take-up of parental and family responsibilities. All the evidence here suggests that public policies must go beyond the objectives laid down in Barcelona in 2002 for pre-school childcare provision, which only goes part way to addressing the needs of workers with family responsibilities. To address these, the public authorities must give a comprehensive response to services that are essential to enable workers to fulfill their work obligations while discharging their parental and family responsibilities.

- pre-school childcare provision
- out-of-school childcare provision, including in school holidays, or outside normal working hours.
- sick child sitter services
- intake, accommodation and short or long-term care provision for dependent persons
- home care services
- outside help

Addressing all families' needs in order to reconcile work and family life requires the public authorities to develop childcare provision for children from infancy upwards for working parents, which accommodates children who may have short periods of illness, a disability or serious illness. In this connection, they must pay special heed to addressing the particular needs of parents of disabled, or seriously, chronically or incurably ill children, by developing a network of services appropriate to their health condition, bearing in mind these parents' wishes to have their children in mainstream provision wherever possible, conditions permitting. This will require appropriate adjustments to mainstream provision.

They should also engage with [population ageing](#) and emerging (complex) dependency needs among a growing (in absolute terms) number of older people. Care for (elderly) dependent people, whether disabled, chronically or seriously ill, also requires intake, short-term respite and long-term accommodation, care and home help services to be put in place to support families.

All services of whatever kind should be provided in sufficient quantity and be geographically accessible and affordable to all. They could possibly be supplemented by [child monitoring and elder support services which could in certain circumstances be community-based local authority provision](#).

Alongside these essential services, families also need to be able to enlist [outside assistance to help with household chores](#). This outside assistance would free-up time for them to devote to other activities. Such service provision could qualify for:

- [income tax relief for families that use it](#)
- [a state financial contribution to the wages and employer's social security contributions on the pay of individuals employed under a proper employment contract \(e.g., in the form of service vouchers\)](#).

### ***3.3. Parental and family leave and flexible working hours***

A third area relates to parental and family leave policy, and flexible working hours or careers for family reasons.

- [job protection for a set time before and after the leave period;](#)
- [status protection for workers on a career break or temporary short-hours working to take parental or family responsibility leave](#)
- [preservation of vocational training and promotion rights during career breaks or short-hours working;](#)
- [preservation of the worker's full social security rights](#)

These conditions already obtain in some Member States for some or all types of leave, but are far from being the norm. Across-the-board application of these conditions, which are in line with the settled case law of the European Court of Justice, is especially important because they enable [family responsibility leave to form part of a workers' career path continuum rather than causing a break in it](#).

[Preservation of individual social security rights](#) during these periods should also over time make it possible to do away with all the special rights granted exclusively to women in certain cases to improve their pension rights. The evidence is that while such derived or specific rights may have beneficial short-term impacts on women's pensions, they have in practice been found to have a socially conservative effect by strengthening the traditional

division of family roles which in the longer term works against achieving gender equality in employment and equality *per se*.

- social security coverage of parental and family leave

The European Commission should encourage the European social partners to organize cover of **parental and family responsibility leave** within social security systems, as the ILO recommended over a quarter of a century ago (Recommendation N° 156) such as to have a **paid** system in all Member States. The introduction of parental or family insurance has the twofold advantage of

- **sharing out the cost of leave between employers**, who would all contribute to financing the insurance scheme in proportion to their business's total wage bill;
- **covering the loss-of-pay risk incurred by workers** with parental or family responsibilities who use the scheme.

The general rule should be that all parental and family leave is a **individual and non-transferable right**. The joint parental leave schemes operating in Finland, Sweden and Norway in particular, have in practice shown the limits on couples' freedom of choice in terms of men's engagement with child care. Joint leave provision can only become a real factor of change if one of the qualifying conditions is an obligation to share it in two equal and non-transferable parts.

**There should be flexibility in the take-up of parental and family leave** (including maternity leave outside the period essential to protect maternal and child health) so as to limit the period of complete separation from work whose adverse effects on the value of knowledge and skills are an oft-rehearsed complaint. Parental and family leave should also as far as possible:

- **be able to be staggered**
- **offer scope for moving flexibly from a full career break to short hours, or between different work patterns**

The options offered to workers should also allow for parental and family leave to be taken at the same time.

Flexible working hours and specific leave arrangements should also be provided for people with dependent disabled, chronically or seriously ill children, and those caring for a dependent elderly parent or any other dependent family member (spouse or partner, brother, sister, etc.).

Parental and family leave should therefore form part of carefully-designed "flexicurity" arrangements that would address not only economic imperatives but also family requirements.

- **framework agreements for different types of parental and family leave**

In order to get organised coverage for parental and family leave onto the policy agenda of Member States that have none, and those where it still remains fragmentary or not organised, and so give recognition to and provide protection for parental and family responsibilities generally as a specific occupational risk, the European Commission should encourage the European social partners to negotiate **framework agreements** like that concluded on 14 December 1995 for parental leave, in order to set out the conditions and procedures of such protection for other types of leave. The Commission should also give them binding force by incorporating them in specific directives as it did in 1996 for parental leave (Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996).

**Negotiating a framework agreement on personal, non-transferable paternity leave - dealt with in a nonbinding resolution of the Council and Ministers for Employment and Social Policy in June 2000 - should be given priority**, because social recognition of the father's right to stay at home to settle-in a newborn child is singularly important to bringing about change in the perception of fatherhood and the roles traditionally associated with it.

**Paternity leave which, as has just been seen, effectively means a father's settling-in leave on birth, should be patterned on the mother's settling-in leave component of maternity leave.** It should carry the same conditions and the same procedures. If the mother's settling-in leave is **compulsory**, so should the father's settling-in leave be.

- **revision of Directive 92/85/EEC concerning measures to protect the health and safety of pregnant workers, women workers who have recently given birth and women who are breastfeeding**

Implementing the **principle of parental equality** in practice requires the post-natal settling-in leave granted to fathers and mothers to be the same duration for both. This aim can only be achieved through a revision of maternity leave in order clearly divide it into that part which is to **protect the health of the mother and child**, and that part which is for **settling-in the newborn child**. Splitting maternity leave between these two functions would enable paternity leave to be patterned on the mother's settling-in leave.

It would also enable:

- **improved delivery of maternal and child health protection** by freeing-up the periods of time essential to the proper course of a normal pregnancy and physical recovery of the mother after a normal childbirth; once determined, these periods should evidently be made mandatory in all Member States;
- **the mother's period of post-natal settling-in leave to be incorporated in the measures to reconcile family life and working life.** Taking the sum and substance of this part of maternity leave to this new level would allow it to be taken up with some flexibility in practice. It would afford women the option to minimise the period of complete post-natal separation from work, with its familiar adverse impacts on their employability, especially in the event of protracted maternity leave. It would also address the

concerns of self-employed women for whom specific solutions must be found now to address their need to stay working in order to keep their business running or secure their family's living level.

The wide diversity of durations, division and methods of use of ante- and post-natal maternity leave found in the Member States suggests that the revision of Directive 92/85/EEC cannot be done without first tasking a multidisciplinary group of experts to determine exactly what period of ante- and post-natal maternity leave is essential to maternal and child health protection on the basis of established and empirically demonstrable scientific criteria.

### ***3.4. Education and training***

- including gender equality as a national curriculum subject

It is strongly recommended that gender equality be included as a national curriculum subject from primary school, as this would give the means to act on and shape gender identity construction at the earliest stage. Waiting until children reach the age of six or seven to start the learning process may be too late to entrench equality in attitudes and behaviour, as these are shaped by early learning. **With this aim in view, gender equality should also be factored into the learning activities dispensed to preschool children who attend childcare facilities or playschools.**

- training for health workers and educators

**Health workers and educators should be given training to deal with all issues concerning children equally with the father or mother.** Casting fathers in the role of subsidiary parent starts as early as the maternity clinic, where they are made to feel out of place, very often unwanted, and left to their own devices. But parenthood is a learning curve that starts at childbirth, or even from when the pregnancy is discovered. This holds true for fathers as much as for mothers, but there is no support provision for them.

- advisory or training services for men

Local advisory or training services should be set up to help men understand the value of their being at home and with their children, and the need to share with their wives or partners the domestic and family tasks that are essential to their well-being and self-fulfilment. These services should also give men the wherewithal to develop their own skill sets to deal with this situation.

### ***3.5. Information***

- company information campaigns
- public information campaigns
- workplace (or local) information units

Male workers offer various explanations for their low take-up of parental and family leave. Aside from fear of the adverse career impacts of a complete or partial separation from work, the most often-cited reasons are:

- the employer's lack of understanding or opposition
- ridicule from fellow workers

Campaigns to make employers and male (but also female) workers aware of the importance of fathers being with their children from birth are very worthwhile. They could also be a way to inform male workers about their inalienable right to stay at home to provide care for children (or any other dependent family member) at no cost to their career, job security or stability of employment in the company, in accordance with the Council and Ministers for Employment and Social Policy Resolution on Paternity Leave of 29 June 2000. Encouragement should be given to quality certification or merit award schemes for workplaces that promote the take-up of parental and family leave by men.

Lack of understanding and opposition among family, friends and neighbours also constitute significant barriers to men's take-up of parental and family leave. Public information campaigns putting across the same message as company information schemes would be a useful addition to the provision needed to bring about attitudinal change. The full range of media, especially television and the Internet, should be leveraged to maximise the reach of these campaigns. They could possibly be supported by advertising campaigns in the form of public service announcements to get the messages across more widely.

Arguably, lack of knowledge about their rights is a significant factor in the infrequent take-up of parental and family leave by men, and male and female workers generally. Primary information units should be set up in workplaces or by local councils to inform male and female jobholders about their rights, and how take-up might affect their social security rights generally, and especially their pension rights. Flexible working hours or careers, especially those that are outside or go beyond family responsibility schemes, may hold unpleasant surprises for ill-informed workers in this area.

### ***3.6. Organisation of time***

Orchestrating public and private life times has been among the collective functions that have fallen to the family since the spheres of public and private life became separated. Synchronising the different life times of family members has traditionally been the woman's job. Their steadily rising labour force participation since the 1960s-1970s prevents them from fulfilling this function effectively.

- time management offices
- time coordination services

Encouragement should be given to setting up time management offices, of the kind found in some towns in Italy and France especially, with the job of coordinating private time and public time.

Invaluable as they may be, however, local time management offices are not enough to solve the daily time coordination problems faced by workers with parental or family responsibilities, who in many cases have no control over decisions relating to the organisation of social times.



The collective function of orchestrating life times therefore needs to be outsourced, and taken in charge by a new institution to be established by a different tier of government (regional or national) than local authority level. The essential thing is to know what. Largely unexplored in the research into time use so far, it should be looked into in greater depth in order to determine how it could be effectively delivered on a collective scale.

In the current state of knowledge, it can be suggested that [the coordination function which these new services should be tasked with should focus less on orchestrating private and public time](#) (although private time should not be dismissed from the discussions, as it should be the ultimate beneficiary of coordination) [than on the different public times](#) (work, school, the opening hours of childcare facilities, family care and help services and government agencies, schedules of public transport, etc.), the alignment of which plays into equality in employment and between parents. These services should have the power to [put forward solutions for synchronising times](#) at the level of government (national or federal, regional or local) where decisions are taken [in order to ensure consistency and work out proposed official solutions where times cannot be made to match up](#).