

# Work and Family: The way to care is to share!

Adulthood can in many ways be seen as the "rush-hour" of life. The pursuit of decent work and providing care for family members, whilst attempting to fulfil obligations to enterprises, communities and societies, is a challenge. In many societies, women's participation in the workforce has increased, due to greater educational and economic opportunities and also because households and women, themselves, have a greater need for income.

Even as more women than ever work for pay, their share of family responsibilities has not diminished. In many instances, men's low participation in family responsibilities has remained resilient. Moreover, changes in families with more single-parents, especially single-mother households, and fewer extended family households, together with migration and other social and economic factors, often mean that informal support for care has declined. For some, family responsibilities have even intensified. Some countries are rapidly ageing, with older family members needing care from younger family members. Globally, the number of older persons is expected to exceed the number of children for the first time ever in 2047.<sup>1</sup> Epidemics such as HIV/AIDS have also increased the number of people needing care. At the same time, many countries have cut back in their spending on health and public services, thus shifting greater responsibility for unpaid care work to family members.

Moreover, current situations in working conditions have made it increasingly difficult for both women and men to balance their work and family responsibilities in a satisfactory manner. These realities include precarious work arrangements, low wages, long working hours, the densification of working time – leaving hardly any unproductive time during working hours – and unpredictable demands for overtime.

These changes and realities in particular put women in a vulnerable situation, as they continue to be the main care-providers, on top of paid work. Thus, many working women end up with much longer working days and an increased overall work-load, as unpaid work at home and family responsibilities are not yet equally shared between women and men. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes combined with societal expectations and pressures can also make it difficult for men to share family responsibilities. Research has indicated that men have a lot to gain through better work-family balance, ranging from better contact with their children and more involvement in family life, when they are in dual-income partnerships.<sup>2</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> UN, 2007. *World Population Ageing* (DESA, Population Division, New York), p. xxvi.

<sup>2</sup> Marinova, J., 2003. *Gender Stereotypes and the Socialization Process*, DAW/ILO/UNAIDS/UNDP, Expert Group Meeting, *The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality*, 21-24 October 2003, p. 9.

Increasing evidence from both developed and developing countries shows that the lack of effective policies to address the work-family conflict can cause major problems for societies, enterprises, families, men and women. For example, poor work-family reconciliation has contributed to the decline of fertility rates in many countries because women find it difficult to combine a job or career with having children. Where childcare is lacking, parents may face difficult options such as enlisting older children to care for younger children, or taking children with them to work, often preventing these children from going to school or ending up in child labour. Women may be compelled to leave the labour market or look for part-time work, which can carry negative consequences for their earnings, skill development and rights to voice and social protection.

Policies and measures by governments and social partners to help workers reconcile work and family can make a difference. In 1981, ILO Member States adopted the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 165).<sup>3</sup> These two instruments firmly place equality of opportunity and treatment for both women and men workers with family responsibilities within the wider framework of measures to promote gender equality alongside ILO's Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111), Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183). The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1979 (CEDAW) also recognizes the importance of sharing family responsibilities.

These international instruments marked the recognition that gender inequality is deeply intertwined with the gender division of productive and reproductive work (see box 1) and that both women and men need support for their roles in the world of work and in the family. Thus, in the light of Convention No. 156, achieving gender equality requires policies to better enable men and women with family responsibilities to prepare for, enter, advance and remain in employment. To this end, reducing inequalities between men and women in the labour market and at home has to become a key objective of national policies.



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### BOX 1. WHAT ARE UNPAID FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES?

In Convention No.156, "family responsibilities" refers specifically to responsibilities in relation to "dependent children" and "other members of the immediate family who clearly need their care or support" (Art.1), such as children, elderly, disabled or sick people. The United Nations Systems of National Accounts of 1993 (SNA) includes some unpaid work activities among "economic or market work", for example: unpaid work in a family business or for the market; subsistence production or collection of water and fuel. However, unpaid family responsibilities or "unpaid care work" are excluded from the SNA and GDP calculations and encompass the non-economic activities that enable the care and maintenance of every member of society, underpinning societal health and survival. These unpaid services consist of: providing care for infants and children (active and passive), the permanently ill or temporarily sick, as well as for older relatives and the disabled; household maintenance, cleaning, washing, cooking, shopping; and all volunteer work for community services.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> As of January 2009, 40 countries have ratified Convention No. 156. For a list of ratifications, see: <http://www.ilo.org/ilolex/english/newratframeE.htm>  
<sup>4</sup> Antonopoulos, R., 2008. *The Unpaid Care Work-Paid Connection*, Working Paper no. 541 (Levy Economics Institute of Bard college, New York).



## WORKERS WITH FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES: SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

All workers, both women and men, should be able to engage in employment without being subject to discrimination related to a perceived conflict between their employment and their family responsibilities. They should be free from restrictions based on family responsibilities when preparing for and entering, participating or advancing in economic activity. The challenges of balancing work and family responsibilities affect the equal opportunities and treatment in occupation of women, in particular. While in 2007, 1.2 billion women around the world worked, almost 200 million or 18.4 per cent more than ten years ago,<sup>5</sup> they are often confined to work in the less productive and decent jobs, with poor access to adequate and fair pay, social protection, basic rights and voice at work. Women also continue to bear the main bulk of family responsibilities and the cost of adjusting to the increased load of both paid and unpaid work. Time-use studies around the world show that women spend considerably more time than men in non-market unpaid family work. For example, in Bolivia women spend 35 hours in unpaid work per week compared to 9 hours for men while, in contrast, men typically spend more hours in paid economic activities than women—42 weekly hours versus women's 26.<sup>6</sup> However, when hours in paid and unpaid work are totalled, women tend to have longer work weeks than men and less time for training, political activities, their own leisure time or health care.

This also affects women's availability for paid economic activities. For example, in the European Union (EU), the employment rate for women falls by an average of 12 percentage points when they have children, and the gap between the employment rates of men and women with children is as high as 26 points.<sup>7</sup> In Latin America, over half of all non-employed women aged 20 to 24 cite their unpaid household work as the main reason they do not seek paid employment.<sup>8</sup> Even when women do participate in the labour market, family responsibilities often dictate the amount and type of paid work that women can undertake.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, family responsibilities are one of the reasons women turn to vulnerable and informal employment, the latter providing the degree of flexibility and proximity that enable them to fulfil household and child care responsibilities. Women may also involuntarily choose to work part-time. In most countries, the vast majority of part-time workers are women, which is often synonymous with low status jobs, with limited career opportunities. However, part-time work can help reconcile work and family responsibilities especially when made available to both women and men, and provided on terms and conditions of employment that are equivalent to those of full-time workers. On the other hand, in countries where recent legislative reforms entitle employees to request changes to their working hours, take-up rates have been very low. This may suggest that employees, especially men, fear that such requests may have a negative impact on their career development or the way they are seen by their peers.

At the same time, working conditions that demand long hours in paid work equally undermine both men's and women's capacity to provide quality care. ILO global estimates indicate that about one in five or 614.2 million workers around the world are working more than 48 hours per week. The share of men and women putting in excessive working time is particularly important in a number of countries, such as Ethiopia, Honduras, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, and Pakistan; where more than 30 per cent of all employees are reported to work more than 48 hours per week. Men tend to be more likely to work excessive hours, both a consequence of gender stereotypes, but also a cause, reinforcing existing divisions of labour.<sup>10</sup> Long working hours, but also low and unequal wages and incomes, often reduce women's option as to whether to work, where and in which types of employment.



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<sup>5</sup> ILO, 2008. *Global Employment Trends for Women* (Geneva).

<sup>6</sup> UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2007. *Estadísticas para la Equidad de Género: Magnitudes y Tendencias en América Latina* (Santiago).

<sup>7</sup> EUROSTAT, 2008. *Report on equality between women and men – 2008* (European Commission, Brussels).

<sup>8</sup> ECLAC, 2007. *Social Panorama of Latin America 2006* (Santiago).

<sup>9</sup> Verceles, N.A. and S.N. Beltran, 2004. *Reconciling work and family. Philippine Country Study*, Unpublished Working Paper (ILO, Conditions of Work and Employment Programme (TRAVAIL, Geneva). And Marucci, P.N., 2001. *Jobs, gender and small enterprises in Africa and Asia: Lessons drawn from Bangladesh, the Philippines, Tunisia and Zimbabwe*, Series on Women's Entrepreneurship Development and Gender in Enterprises No.58. (ILO, InFocus Programme on Boosting Employment through Small Enterprise Development (SEED), Geneva).

<sup>10</sup> Lee, S., McCann, D. and J.C. Messenger, 2007. *Working time around the world: Trends in working hours, laws and policies in a global comparative perspective*, Routledge (ILO, Geneva), p. 240.

In addition, few reliable and affordable social care services, in particular childcare and health care, have emerged to address the increased need for care. Yet, these facilities, along with transportation, water and energy supply, rank among the topmost concerns for workers. As regards childcare, almost half of the world's countries have no formal programmes for children under 3, and for those that do have programme, coverage is limited.<sup>11</sup> For parents with older pre-school children, early childcare and education programmes exist and are expanding in most developing countries, although these too remain uneven in their coverage, with little access in particular for poor and rural communities, and they often do not meet the needs of working parents in terms of duration, quality and costs of programmes.<sup>12</sup> In many countries school hours often end long before the working day finishes or they include long lunch breaks, making it difficult for working parents to accommodate this within their paid-working schedules.

Similarly, the aging of the population and the increasing proportion of dependent elderly requiring long-term care indicate the growing challenge of working parents in both developed and developing countries. The formal long-term care services, such as institutional care, specialized community- and home-based providers, have been particularly slow to develop, with family members still taking on the whole bulk of long-term care.<sup>13</sup>

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has also heavily affected and exacerbated all the dimensions of unpaid care work, with critical implications for gender inequalities. Difficulty in accessing institutional health care often means that the household, and generally women and girls, have to give up paid employment or schooling to care for the ill or dying at a time when additional resources are needed for medical expenses and to compensate for income loss. Poor families, rural families, racial and ethnic minorities are often hit hardest.<sup>14</sup>

The lack of collective measures and support for balancing paid work and family responsibilities constrains many households to turn to 'individual reconciliation strategies', often with adverse consequences to families' well-being and decent work objectives. This situation hits poor and vulnerable families the hardest, as they have the weakest economic capacity to purchase goods (processed foods, labour saving devices) or services (private childcare, health services for the ill, domestic help, see box 2) that can free up time for paid work. For them, work-family conflict severely restricts their options, often forcing them to choose between employment and care, or to combine them, all of which require painful trade-offs in terms of quality of employment and/or quality of care and long-term consequences for escaping poverty.

### BOX 2. DOMESTIC WORK: A COMMON "COPING" SOLUTION

For families in middle to high income groups, hiring domestic workers is a key means to overcome the lack of collective support for family responsibilities. Domestic work provides millions of jobs throughout the world, in countries at all levels of development, and contributes to a considerable amount of home-based care. Domestic workers are predominantly women, often children from more vulnerable groups in society—from poor communities, rural areas, ethnic and racial minorities, immigrants. The ILO found that in most countries around the world domestic workers are subject to *de jure* unequal treatment relative to other wage-earners. Moreover, law enforcement is often lax because of, among other reasons, the hidden, "behind the doors" nature of their work. As a result, most domestic workers are employed informally, at very low wages, with few legal rights or social protections and little access to voice and representation. Nevertheless, in some countries, legislative efforts have been made to improve the legal rights of domestic workers. For example, in South Africa, since 2002, domestic workers have the right to minimum wages, paid leave, overtime payments and severance pay and employers are required to register them with the Unemployment Insurance Fund and pay contributions thus making them eligible for unemployment and maternity benefits.

Source: ILO, 2009. *Law and Practice Report on Decent Work for Domestic Workers* (Geneva).

With no other support for childcare, poor families often cope by leaving children home alone, by enlisting the help of an older sibling – often a girl removed from school – or by taking children to work with them. For example, in Indonesia, 40 per cent of working women care for their children while working; 37 per cent rely on female

<sup>11</sup> Education For All, 2007. *Strong foundations: Early childhood care and education*, Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO, Paris).

<sup>12</sup> Hein C. and N. Cassirer, 2009. *Workplace partnerships for childcare solutions* (forthcoming), (ILO, Geneva).

<sup>13</sup> Briodsky, J., Habib J. and M. Hirschfeld (eds), 2002. *Long-term care in developing countries: Ten case-studies* (WHO, Geneva).

<sup>14</sup> Addati, L. and N. Cassirer, 2008. *Equal Sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS*. Paper prepared for the UN CSW Expert Group Meeting, *Equal Sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including care-giving in the context of HIV/AIDS*, 6-8 October 2008, Geneva, Switzerland (ILO, Geneva).



relatives and 10 per cent deploy older female children to help.<sup>15</sup> In Nairobi, 54 per cent of poorer mothers were found to bring their babies to work, whereas 85 per cent of better off mothers had 'house-girls'.<sup>16</sup> Leaving children alone, in the care of older siblings or unqualified caregivers has clear implications for the health and development of young children, and for the long-term educational and employment opportunities of those children who withdraw from school to provide care and domestic work. In addition, having children at work not only takes away from the time and investment that women can put into paid work, including training and business development, but it also places children in hazardous environments and at risk of child labour.

Poor families are also particularly affected by the lack of collective support for the elderly, chronically sick and disabled people. Most developing countries face severe shortages of adequate and affordable long-term care arrangements as well as social security schemes for supporting families who take care of those dependants. For instance, in 2002, in the Philippines, there were only 13 publicly-funded centres providing social services for the disabled, elderly persons and special groups nationwide.<sup>17</sup> Relatives of those dependents, especially women, face serious constraints in reconciling work and family, which often results in them losing their paid jobs, partly or permanently.

### BOX 3. MEN AND ELDERLY CARE

Increasingly, men in the United States worry about the conflict between caring for their parents and their role as breadwinner. It is estimated that men make up nearly 40 per cent of family care providers, up from 19 per cent in a 1996. About 17 million men are primary care-givers for an adult. Just as active fatherhood became more acceptable in the baby-boom generation, so has the care-giving role for many sons as their parents' age today. Smaller families and more women working full-time have contributed to this shift. Men are concerned that their care-giving would be held against them in the workplace, feeding into the perception that men are more commonly preferred in recruitment because they will focus 100 per cent on their work.

Source: US Alzheimer's Association and the National Alliance for Caregiving. Leland, J., 28 November 2008. *More Men Take the Lead Role in Caring for Elderly Parents*, New York Times (New York).

The impacts on society, work and gender roles in care-giving will need to be taken into consideration in re-shaping policies and adapting priorities on care and social protection.

## PLACING WORK-FAMILY MEASURES ON THE POLICY AGENDA



Work-family measures are policy solutions intended to facilitate all workers' access to decent work by explicitly and systematically addressing and supporting their unpaid family responsibilities. ILO Convention No. 156 and Recommendation No. 165 provide considerable policy guidance and represent a flexible tool to support the formulation of policies that enable men and women workers with family responsibilities to exercise their right to engage, participate and advance in employment without discrimination. Work-family measures can be taken at the national, community and workplace levels and are intended to make family responsibilities more compatible with paid work and to make working conditions more compatible with unpaid family responsibilities. Policies that actively encourage men to participate in family responsibilities are needed. This will only be possible through behaviour-changing measures, such as paid paternity and parental leave.

Government has a leadership role to play in setting policy orientation and creating a social climate that is conducive to dialogue and change for

<sup>15</sup> Kamerman, S.B., 2000. *Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): An overview of developments in OECD countries* (Institute for Child and Family Policy, Columbia University, New York). Available at [www.columbia.edu/cu/childpolicy/kamerman.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/childpolicy/kamerman.pdf) [accessed 30 January 2009].

<sup>16</sup> A. Lakati et al., 2002. "Breastfeeding and the working mother in Nairobi", in *Public Health Nutrition*, Vol. 5, No. 6, Dec., pp. 715-718.

<sup>17</sup> ILO, 2004. "Reconciling work and family in the Philippines", Unpublished TRAVAIL Country Study (Geneva).

improving work–family reconciliation. In particular, government has the key responsibility of carefully design legislation in view of equality objectives, thus challenging the gendered division of paid and unpaid work. As the ILO Committee of Experts has noticed, “*measures designed to promote harmonization of work and family responsibilities, such as childcare services, should not be specific to women*”.<sup>18</sup> In fact, excluding fathers' access perpetuates the idea that women alone are responsible for their children's care, and raises risks of discrimination against women in the workplace.



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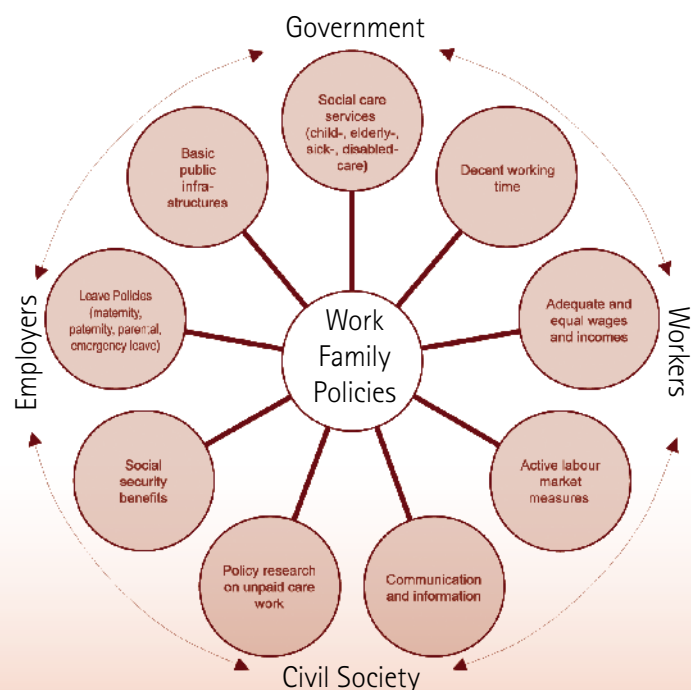
### BOX 4. KEY REQUIREMENTS FOR FAMILY-FRIENDLY MEASURES TO BE GENDER EQUALITY-FRIENDLY

- Recognizing men's caring role: Offering parental leave and making parental leave, after the initial maternity leave, available to both men and women and non-transferable.
- Making paid work more family-compatible: Flexible arrangements with regard to working schedules, rest periods and holidays; provision of annual leave, short leave for emergencies; (good) part-time, flexitime, time banking, teleworking, reduction of daily hours of work and of overtime.
- Making family responsibilities more compatible with work: Ensure availability of affordable and good-quality child-care and other family services and facilities that assist workers in meeting their employment and family responsibilities.
- Promoting a more equal sharing of family responsibilities between men and women, through information, awareness-raising measures and education policies.
- Promoting public and private actions to lighten the burden of family and household responsibilities through labour-saving devices, public transport, supply of water and energy.

Source: ILO, *Addressing gender equality through work family measures*, Information Sheets on Work and Family, No. 2, TRAVAIL, 2004, Geneva.

As Convention No. 156 establishes, in designing and implementing work-family measures, workers' and employers' organizations have indispensable roles to play (Art.11). In addition, establishing a tripartite national policy framework, encouraging collective bargaining agreements that reinforce and potentially surpass statutory requirements, fostering family-friendly measures in the workplace, improving working conditions while ensuring the competitiveness of enterprises, are proven approaches for ensuring national and workplace policies that are relevant and responsive to the needs of workers and employers.

The following diagram summarizes the diverse measures to promote work–family reconciliation established by ILO standards on workers with family responsibilities, which fall mainly within the direct means of action of governments, social partners and civil society actors.



Source: [www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/family/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/family/index.htm) [accessed 30 January 2009].

<sup>18</sup> ILO, 1999. Direct request made by the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEARC) to Guatemala concerning Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) (Geneva).



Developing integrated work-family policies is not just an issue concerning the welfare of individual workers and their families; it affects the social and economic development of the whole society. Governments, as well as employers, trade unions and the public, at large, are increasingly realizing that many families are having difficulties balancing work and care needs of their dependents. In particular, parents' ability to work and work productively is being limited by the lack of sound work-family measures while many children, elderly, sick and disabled are being affected by the lack of quality care. It is thus increasingly accepted that it is in the public interest to elaborate and implement integrated work-family policies, since this has significant beneficial effects to society as a whole.



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#### BOX 5. EXAMPLES OF WORK-FAMILY POLICIES FROM CHILE, CROATIA, INDIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

In recognizing that lack of childcare poses significant barriers to women's labour force participation, the government of Chile, which ratified C156 in 1994, has made considerable efforts to expand childcare services as a means to create better quality jobs and to promote gender equality and national development. Since 2005, the number of free public nursery places for children aged 3 months to 2 years who are living in the poorest areas of Chile has increased from 14,400 to 64,000 in 2008; in addition, kindergarten places for children aged 2-4 years, which numbered 84,000 in 2005, will expand to about 127,000 by 2009.<sup>19</sup>

In fulfilling its obligations under C156 and other UN gender-related instruments, in 2006 Croatia adopted the National Policy for the Promotion of Gender Equality (2006-10), which sets out a number of specific measures promoting the sharing of family responsibilities between men and women and increasing the availability of childcare services as a means of achieving effective equality of opportunity and treatment between men and women workers.<sup>20</sup>

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NRAGA), launched by the Government of India in 2005, recognizes the implications that family responsibilities carry vis-à-vis women's ability to freely engage in paid economic activities. The NRAGA includes on-site crèches among other worksite facilities, such as medical aid, drinking water and shade, that local implementing agencies have to set out in order ensure the effective implementation of the employment-generating programme.<sup>21</sup>

In South Africa, the government is implementing a non-conditional cash benefit programme, the Child Support Grant, in the form of child allowances paid to the main child caregiver, with the concern of avoiding the reinforcement of the role of women as primary carer within the household. The grant is not conditional on the carer having to attend training sessions or performing unpaid community work, a controversial feature of family and child allowances in other developing countries. In May 2006, the total beneficiaries summed up to almost 7 million children.<sup>22</sup>

Comprehensive work-family policies are an essential aspect of quality working life and have to become a key component of employment and social national strategies aimed at achieving gender equality and decent work.

<sup>19</sup> Hein C. and N. Cassirer, 2009. op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> ILO, 2008. Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (articles 19, 22 and 35 of the Constitution). Third item on the agenda: Information and reports on the application of Conventions and Recommendations International Labour Conference, 97<sup>th</sup> Session, 2008 Report III (Part 1A) General Report and observations concerning particular countries, p. 360.

<sup>21</sup> Operational Guidelines of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, 2006. Section 5.6 (New Delhi).

<sup>22</sup> Razavi, S., 2007. *The political and social economy of care in a development context: Conceptual issues, research questions and policy options*, Paper No. 3, (UNRISD Programme on Gender and Development, Geneva).

Among all work-family measures, the development of affordable, reliable and quality social care services, to ease the conflict between work and caring for young, older and sick relatives, has been broadly recognized among the most cost-effective and gender-sensitive solutions to support the needs of workers with family responsibilities. In particular, ILO research on childcare for working parents has found that the external benefits related to these measures accruing to society, employers, workers and their families, are numerous. Specifically, childcare:

- Promotes gender equality, improving women's opportunities for employment, self-development and empowerment.
- Helps prevent the perpetuation of social inequalities and intergenerational poverty, strengthening families' social and economic security and reducing their vulnerability to risk.
- Facilitates the smooth and efficient functioning of labour markets, through the full utilization of society's growing investment in women's education and a diversified labour force.
- Provides a stronger start for disadvantaged children, enhancing their physical well-being, cognitive and language skills, and social and emotional development.
- Contributes to job creation in the service sector to replace some of the unpaid household work.
- Increases tax revenues since higher participation rates and earnings of parents increase national production.
- Reduces public expenditure on welfare and in the longer term, on remedial education and crime.<sup>23</sup>



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Comprehensive work-family policies also include leave provisions. Childcare leave entitlement has undergone many changes over the last decades. Maternity leave, covered by the ILO Maternity Protection Convention (No. 183), gives the mother the right to a period of rest in relation to childbirth, with cash and medical benefits, employment security and non-discrimination, health protection and right to breastfeed. More recently, there has been a move towards encouraging fathers to take up care-related leave through the introduction of paternity leave (short leave immediately after child-birth) or modifying parental leave, making it available to both parents. These leave entitlements can be paid or unpaid and many different formula are used in different parts of the world. Nonetheless, large proportions of working parents do not have access to these entitlements and take-up rates show that mothers everywhere continue to take more leave than fathers. The gender wage gap is an important element contributing to this stereotype as women continue to earn less than men. Experience shows that parental leave can only be an acceptable solution when it is paid and when fathers and mothers taking this leave do not have to be afraid of losing their jobs or receiving an unfavourable reassignment after the leave. In order not to increase the gender inequalities and the deskilling of women, a policy needs to be in place to support parents, still mostly women, re-entering employment after a leave period for family reasons.

## ILO RESPONSES AND PARTNERSHIPS

The ILO has recognized that the unpaid work in the family and community is often ignored in current thinking about the economy and society, although much of this work is essential to the welfare of not just the young, elderly or sick but also to those in paid work. To address this issue, the Director-General has called on ILO constituents to do much better in valuing and analysing the contributions of unpaid work to countries' economic and social development. *"Such an effort is essential if we are to make it easier for women and men to reconcile the pressures to earn a living and to fulfil responsibilities to the family and community. It is also important in order to understand that what we call*

<sup>23</sup> Hein C. and N. Cassirer, 2009. op.cit.





*economic productivity is in fact indirectly subsidized by the social productivity of unpaid work”.*<sup>24</sup>

Employers' organizations also recognize that “one of the major obstacles faced by women in achieving equality, despite all the measures taken in many countries, continues to be the difficulty of combining family responsibilities with work.”<sup>25</sup> A recent survey conducted by the International Organisation of Employers (IOE) indicates that “family-friendly policies are a key ingredient in helping women back into the labour market” and noted that flexible working time and accessible childcare are



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particularly important for increasing maternal labour force participation.<sup>26</sup> The ILO Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) has recently issued a training package on work and family, which highlights the potential of employers' organizations to be key drivers of work-family policies, especially by providing guidance to member enterprises on the benefits of these measures and how they can be implemented.<sup>27</sup>

In order to promote the well-being of workers and improve work-family reconciliation, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Public Services Internationals (PSI), Education International (EI), the Global Union Federations (GUFs) and their member trade unions have been active in advocating improvements in national legislation and policies, supporting the collective bargaining processes and informing workers of their rights. To promote a family-friendly workplace, trade unions have also been working to increase the number of work-family provisions in collective bargaining agreements. The ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) published, for instance, a training package to assist workers' organizations in collective bargaining on gender equality issues, including family-friendly policies.<sup>28</sup>

Research and technical assistance to ILO constituents on issues related to workers with family responsibilities is also the task of other ILO Departments and Programmes in Geneva and ILO Offices around the world. The Conditions of Work and Employment Programme (TRAVAIL) develops policy research, advocacy, training and technical cooperation intended to encourage ILO constituents to improve working conditions as well productivity in the workplace. A specific programme area of TRAVAIL focuses on work-family issues and maternity protection, as key gender dimensions of quality working life, and, more recently, work on law and practice on domestic workers has been launched in view of discussions on the adoption of a new labour standard on domestic workers. The Bureau for Gender Equality (GENDER) and the network of gender specialists in ILO regional and sub-regional offices have also conducted extensive research and activities on work-family and maternity within their specific contexts, together with the support of the Equality and the Social Security Teams of the International Labour Standards Department (NORMES).

Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs) are also suitable policy and action vehicles through which social partners' priorities, including work-family issues, can be reflected at the country level.

<sup>24</sup> ILO, 2006. *Report of the Director-General: Changing patterns in the world of work*, Report I(C), International Labour Conference, 95<sup>th</sup> Session (Geneva), p. VI.

<sup>25</sup> ILO, 2005. *Employers' organizations taking the lead on gender equality: Case studies from 10 countries* (Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP), Geneva).

<sup>26</sup> International Organisation of Employers (IOE), 2008. *Trends in the workplace survey 2008: Enterprises in a globalizing world*, (Geneva).

<sup>27</sup> ILO, 2008. *Managing diversity in the workplace: Training package on work and family* (ACT/EMP and TRAVAIL, Geneva).

<sup>28</sup> Olney, S., Goodson, B., Maloba-Caines, K. and F. O'Neill, 2002. *Gender Equality: A Guide to Collective Bargaining*, (ILO, Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV) and InFocus Programme on Strengthening Social Dialogue Geneva).

### WHAT CAN BE DONE?

Evidence shows that work-family policies are indispensable to achieving decent and productive work and key to the attainment of equal opportunity and treatment for men and women at work. To this end, an increasing number of legislative and practical measures have been adopted to achieve a work and family balance. Yet, as the ILO supervisory bodies have observed, relatively few governments have set up comprehensive policy frameworks in line with Convention No. 156 and unpaid family responsibilities continue to undermine the achievement of decent work and gender equality objectives.

To ensure progress on this front, governments, international and regional organizations, employers and trade unions, non-government organizations, multi- and bi-lateral actors, Bretton Woods institutions and other relevant actors are encouraged to:

- Promote the ratification and implementation of the Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and the implementation of its corresponding Recommendation (No. 165), which set out an integrated policy framework for making paid work more compatible with family responsibilities and making care-giving more compatible with paid work. These instruments aim at a better sharing of family responsibilities between men and women and at equality of opportunity and treatment of men and women with family responsibilities.
- Providing a broader equality framework by ratifying and implementing ILO Conventions Nos. 100, 111 and 183.
- Review and revise or adopt gender-sensitive policies to improve the recognition, status and welfare of caregivers, both paid and unpaid, in terms of rights, social protection, working conditions, and representation.
- Undertake coordinated efforts to address the global shortage, migration and working conditions of health care workers as a means to improve national capacities of health care services and alleviate current demands on women and girls to provide unpaid care services in their households and communities, particularly in the context of HIV/AIDS.
- Increase public investment in infrastructure and public services to alleviate the unpaid work demands on households which particularly affect women and girls (including transportation, water and energy supply, health services, childcare and other family and community services).
- Improving working conditions and the quality of working life, including measures aimed at: the progressive reduction of hours of work and the reduction and amount of overtime; more flexible arrangements in working schedules, rest periods and holidays; adequate and fair wages and incomes; and social protection measures.
- Offer support to parents re-entering employment after a leave period for family reasons.
- Strengthen social dialogue and coordination between line ministries, employers, trade unions, women's organizations, and civil society to ensure coherent policies and measures to promote greater understanding, recognition and sharing of family responsibilities, between the State, the private sector and households, and between women and men.



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This background brochure has been prepared as part of the ILO public awareness raising campaign on "Gender equality at the heart of decent work".

Please contact us on [gendercampaign@ilo.org](mailto:gendercampaign@ilo.org) for information on additional ILO themes addressed by this gender equality campaign.