



RESEARCH REPORT

NEEDS OF UNEMPLOYED WOMEN IN TESTING TERRITORIES

WP 2 - Research and Best Practice



This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014- 2020).

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Agreement Number	VS/2018/0416
Project Acronym	MASP
Project Full Title	Master parenting in work and life
Work Package N. Title	WP 2 – Research and best practice
Work Package Leader	Gruppo Cooperativo CGM
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INTRODUCTION

The research activities were conducted in the framework of the MASP Project and aims to provide tools to understand which services and means to access them can effectively support a more equitable management of *care* time (not only in terms of parenting, but also intended as the care of elderly relatives or people with disabilities)¹, as well as to explore both the presence - or vice versa, the absence - of organisational corporate *policies* capable of cutting down the scope of those factors that trigger conflicts between work and family experiences. This is a key topic for the European political community, which on the one hand, encourages companies to experiment with more flexible organisational methods, while on the other, it urges institutions to commit to launch appropriate measures on the *new social rights* of contemporary families.² In this direction the DIRECTIVE (EU) 2019/1158 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, entered into force in August 2019. The directive it's important because aims to improve not only work-life balance but also contribute to an increase in women's employment and families' economic stability.

Despite the social transformations, the family, work and welfare systems are still structured according to the traditional model:

- ✓ the shared participation in paid work of the two genders does not correspond to an equal sharing of care responsibilities in the family context (in particular for minors, the elderly and non-self-sufficient

¹ The word *care* is subject to manifold definitions. Without trying to engage in an in-depth etymologic argumentation and the wide meanings of the term, neither in the historical overview nor in the cultural or moral obligations that it may evoke, in particular for women, recalled by the main theories on the topic formulated over time, we highlight that the English word *care/caring* is more suitable for giving the idea of the *process of caring* as orienting oneself to someone or something by also taking into account the action of providing what the other needs for their health and protection, thus "repairing" their vulnerability. The Italian word *cura* may have several accepted and conflicting, or even opposite, meanings: it is "proactive involvement, competence, assistance", "a commitment involving the soul too", but it is also "apprehension, concern, an annoying thought", cfr. Ida Farè, "Sapere Femminile e città della cura", in *Che "genere" di città per il futuro*, vol.6 n.10, June 2013, Università degli studi Federico II, Naples. For some theoretical *classical inspirations* on the subject, refer to C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice. Psychological Theory on Women's Development*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1982; Neal Noddings, *Caring. A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984; J.C. Tronto, "Women and Caring: What Can Feminists Learn About Morality From Caring", in Alison M. Jaggar & Susan Bordo (eds.), *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, Rutgers University Press 1989, pages 172—187; Virginia Held, *The Ethics of care: Personal, Political, Global*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006; Pascale Molinier, *Le travail du care*, La dispute, Paris 2013 [Italian translation: *Care: prendersi cura. Un lavoro inestimabile*, Moretti&Vitali, Bergamo 2019].

² Refer to *European Pillar of Social Rights. Building a more inclusive and fairer European Union*, European Commission, November 16, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/betapolitical/files/social-summit-european-pillar-social-rights-booklet_en.pdf. It is important to recall the directive of the European Commission, Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, "EU Work-life Balance Directive enters into force", August 1, 2019:

<https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=89&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9438&langId=en>. We want to underline that Work-Life Balance Directive, which brings in new rights for carers and working parents, must be implemented in all EU member states by the middle of 2022. The proposed introductory text to the Directive states that "work-life balance policies should contribute to the achievement of gender equality".

adults) which remains under the responsibility of women. In Italy, care-related work is divided along traditional lines. Together with Romanian women, Italian women hold the record among Europeans for daily family work at an average of 4.5 hours per day, compared with 1.5 hours for Italian men. Moreover, while Italian women are the most active in care-related work, men are less active than in other countries³;

- ✓ women enter into a work system that is organised according to a "working man" model, hence they have to be available full-time and are not required/expected to be responsible for taking care of family members. Indeed, working hours, performance evaluation criteria, and career mechanisms are defined upon these elements⁴. From this point of view, Italy ranks last (behind only Greece) as regards the female employment rate (below 50% against a European average of 63%). This figure falls further as the number of children increases, to below 40% for women with three or more children. Furthermore, the share of part-time women's employment in Italy reaches 33.2% of women's employment (8.8% for men), which is higher than the European average. It follows that what little female employment there is is part-time, 75% of it involuntary. Evidence shows that the employment rate among single women is higher than that of women in couples without children, which is higher than that of mothers, especially with small children⁵;
- ✓ the familistic welfare model, the Italian social protection system belongs to, is characterized by a limited offer of public care services, given that families (and in particular women) are attributed responsibilities in such a sector; therefore families play the role of protection network and of a source of services for children, sick people and the elderly⁶. A crucial determinant of the female employment rate is the age of the youngest child: with pre-school children, the employment rate of mothers falls dramatically and this is all the more true the less women have invested in education. One of the causes is a structural deficiency in the availability of early childhood education services in relation to the potential catchment area (children under the age of 3). In the 2018/2019 educational year, the supply of specific early childhood education services - crèches, nursery schools, supplementary early childhood services - on the national territory was about 12,213 units on offer, for a total of 354,641 places authorized for operation.⁷ The coverage of places, inclusive of the entirely private offer, with respect to resident

³ Eurostat, *How do women and men use their time*, 2019 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=How_do_women_and_men_use_their_time_-_statistics

⁴ Quadrelli, id. p. 12; Riva E., Zanfrini L. (edited by), *Non è un problema delle donne. La conciliazione lavorativa come chiave di volta della qualità della vita sociale*, Sociologia del lavoro n. 119, Franco Angeli, Milan 2010, p. 10.

⁵ See Istat, "Rapporto annuale, 2021", 9 luglio 2021: Tab. 3.5, pag. 150: https://www.istat.it/storage/rapporto-annuale/2021/Rapporto_Annuale_2021.pdf

⁶ Sabatinelli S., Da Roit B., *Il modello mediterraneo di welfare tra famiglia e mercato*, in "Stato e Mercato" n. 2/2005, Il Mulino, Bologna 2005, pages 267-291

<http://scienze politiche.unical.it/bacheca/archivio/materiale/1720/Sociologia%20Economica/De%20Roit-Sabatinelli%20II%20modello%20mediterraneo%20di%20welfare%20state.pdf>

⁷ "Over the four years between the first survey (a.s. 2013/2014) and the last available year (a.s. 2017/2018), the receptive capacity of the educational system aimed at the 0-3 age group has remained almost unchanged at the national level. A slight reduction (-1.6%) in available places is the result of a slight decrease in the first two years and a weak recovery in the subsequent period". See Istat, *Nidi e servizi educativi per l'infanzia. Stato dell'arte, criticità e sviluppi del sistema educativo in Italia*, Roma, June 2020 publication, https://www.istat.it/it/files/2020/06/report-infanzia_def.pdf

children until 2 years of age stands at 24.7 per cent at national level, this percentage is still far from the Barcelona Objective of 33 per cent set by the European Union for 2010.⁸

In this introduction it is worth noting how the participation in the labour market of the family members between 2008 and 2013 halted the positive trend recorded in previous years and affected recovery in the following years. However, in 2018 the share of families with at least one employee (81.7%) is closer to the level reached in 2008 (82.3%) again.⁹ Finally, the 2019 Eurostat data (published in march 2021) indicates that the tendency to decreased fertility in Italy, underway since 2010, continues. The average number of children per woman has dropped to 1.27 (1.46 in 2010). In 2019, the lowest fertility rates were observed in Malta (1.14 births per woman), Spain (1.23), Italy (1.27), Cyprus (1.33), Greece and Luxembourg (both 1.34). The number of children born to foreign-born mothers – both from other EU Member States and from non-EU countries – has been growing in the EU since 2013 (from when comparable data is available). The share of children born to foreign-born mothers differs significantly between Member States: in 2019, more than 65 % of the children born in Luxembourg were from foreign-born mothers, while in Cyprus, Austria and Belgium this share was around one third. About Italy, on average, Italian women have 1.15 children (1.34 in 2010), while residing foreign citizens have 1.98 (2.43 in 2010).¹⁰

In such a context, to share direct experiences with women, whose role is recognised to be central in determining their condition and needs connected to their *double presence* - according to the traditional category coined by Laura Balbo¹¹ - in between the responsibility for family care, in the absence of an adequate distribution of loads among family members, and the labour-market, could offer useful suggestions given the still complex issues that the public/private relationship historically represents in a country like Italy.

From this point of view, the experience of the Employment Agency of the Autonomous Province of Trento is very rich and since 2008 has constantly monitored the factors leading women to resign from work after having a child - before, during or after maternity leave - in the province of Trento. This analysis resulted in a series of periodical publications edited by the 'Ufficio Studi delle Politiche e del Mercato del Lavoro' of the Employment Agency¹². According to the 2018 publication/study, 60.2% (287 women in absolute terms) of the interviews -

⁸ The Barcelona target has been reached in 12 Member States and all the rest of 16 Member States have not yet reached the target. Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Barcelona Objectives, 2018
https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/bcn_objectives-report2018_web_en.pdf

⁹ Data are available on [Istat](#) in the section Lavoro e retribuzioni/Offerta di lavoro/Famiglie e mercato del lavoro nei nuovi cubi 'Famiglie – condizione occupazionale' e 'Coppie – condizione occupazionale', reference period year 2018, publication of June 2019.

¹⁰ Eurostat, "EU births: decline continues, but not from foreign-born women", March 3rd, 2021
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210323-2?redirect=%2F>

¹¹ Laura Balbo, *La doppia presenza*, "Inchiesta", n. 32, pages 3-6.

¹² The total number of respondents for the three-year period 2013-2015 on the whole provincial territory stands at 477 and is broken down as follows: 140 in 2013, 136 in 2014 and 201 in 2015. For the detection of the qualitative aspects of the phenomenon was articulated a questionnaire structured in seven sections with 56 questions. Cf., "Le astensioni dal lavoro delle donne nel periodo maternità e puerperio" (October 2018), edited by the 'Ufficio Studi sulle Politiche e Mercato del Lavoro' of the Employment Agency of the Autonomous Province of Trento, available at "[Le astensioni dal lavoro delle donne nel periodo maternità e puerperio](#)" (October 2018)

most of them working in private companies and with a full-time permanent contract - consider their resignation as "an obliged option" induced by multiple and inter-connected critical issues: "The incompatible working time, the difficulty of having parental leave / leave, the lack of services or aid to support care, the distance between home and work". In this context, we get to the heart of the problems that the MASP research aims to address in order to propose solutions for Italian workers with care loads¹³.

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE GROUP, CRITERIA, OUTCOMES

METHODOLOGY

The methodology chosen for this first qualitative research effort involved 50 women who took part in the two *pilot* territories, namely the metropolitan area of Milan and the province of Trento by means of *focus groups* and individual in-depth interviews. A online survey was also designed and carried out, which allowed to reach out over 300 people (women and men), with the aim of identifying what services exist and are known across the territories, as well as assessing to what extent they are actually useful to people¹⁴.

In relation to interviews and focus group, as regards Milan, the women registered in AfolMet (Metropolitan Job Agency) databases were contacted. These women were already involved, in various respects, in the services and projects carried out by the Agency, in particular in the Internships section. As for the province of Trento, most of the women participating in this research were previously involved in or benefitted from services and projects funded by the Employment Agency of the Autonomous Province of Trento. The meetings organised to hold the interviews (one hour) and the guided *focus group* discussions - using talking circles (three hours) with a moderator and an observer - took place in the premises of the two territorial Agencies.

The qualitative analysis was based on an interactive participatory approach, which led the participants to express a desire to talk about themselves and "*enter into a relationship*"¹⁵, so that they could be effectively involved in active thinking about their past experiences and lives. The mechanisms of building trust with the two institutions were important for the involvement of women, who responded to the invitations very positively.

The integral reports (in Italian) drawn up by the research teams in the pilot territories, AfolMet and the Employment Agency of the Autonomous Province of Trento, are annexed as appendix to this report (Annex 1).

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The territorial dimension in both on-the-field works went beyond the city perimeter and involved women from different areas in both the information and promotion phase and the effective phase of gathering together.

¹³ *Ibidem*, pag. 30.

¹⁴ Annex 3 contains the research tools (in Italian) designed for field activities and the criteria identified to select the groups of participants.

¹⁵ From here on - unless otherwise specified - are reported in quotation marks, significant expression collected among women who participated in focus groups or interviews both in Milan and in the province of Trento.

The focus groups from Milan and Trento were composed of women with “care loads”, unemployed and looking for a job or employed with insecure jobs. From the point of view of the combination of the sample, the Trento group was composed of members aged between 34 and 47 years. In the province of Trento, women living not only in the city centre but also in the neighbouring towns were contacted, in order to look into any issues related to travel *timings* and the availability of services. The question of time is fundamental in reconciling work and private life¹⁶. On this subject there is abundant literature available, which also highlights the increase in *antisocial working hours*.¹⁷

This category of workers includes night work shifts and weekend jobs on Saturdays and Sundays. But in general, the fact that more and more often, with the increase of “non-standard work”, the working hours diverging from the traditional reference working times (full-time, day-time and weekdays only) have also increased implies both risks and opportunities for work-life balance measures. In general, when it comes to care, the question of city times becomes crucial. So, it is important to observe the territory, “starting from the unity of the body and its practices of daily life”¹⁸.

All users who had contact with the services in charge of the field survey (Afol Metropolitana, Agenzia del Lavoro di Trento) from their databases were invited. The invited sample represented the characteristics of the target group that the project intended to involve and investigate (childless women, young women - under 29 years old, pregnant foreign women, women with parental care responsibilities, women with single-parent families). Women were involved in discussion groups aimed at highlighting the main goals to be achieved. Two groups worked in parallel in the two areas (City of Milan and Autonomous Province of Trento).

The service users in the Milan area are fully representative of the particular composition of the Italian social structure, and of the city of Milan in particular.

As far as Milan is concerned, the women interviewed between the ages of 41 and 45 and over 46 declared themselves to be “employed”, even if with precarious contracts. On the contrary, younger women do not experience a condition of independence that allows them to make challenging choices in the private sphere: it would perhaps be better to understand whether these constraints on independence are explicitly translated into the renunciation of motherhood or whether the existing condition of job insecurity also transforms what women expect and desire. It should be noted that the average age of mothers in Milan is 33.5 years, while the number

¹⁶ Valentina Gualtieri, *Le dimensioni della qualità del lavoro. I risultati sulla III indagine Isfol sulla qualità del lavoro*, Isfol, November 2013. Refer also to: Addabbo, Centra, Cutrarelli, Fuscaldo, Gualtieri, *The quality of work dimensions. Results of a multivariate analysis from the Third Isfol Survey on Quality of work in Italy*, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, 2013; Cicognani S., Cioni M., Savioli M., *The secret to job satisfaction is low expectations: How perceived working conditions differ from actual ones*, Department of Economics and Statistics Working Paper, n. 749, University of Siena, 2017. For a more comprehensive comparison on the topic of working times, well-being and *work-family balance*, also refer to *OECD Better Life Initiative* data referring to 2017 <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/it/topics/work-life-balance-it/>: 1 worker out of 8 in OECD countries works 50 hours a week or more. Turkey is the country with the highest proportion of people working extremely long hours (34%), followed by Mexico with nearly 30% and Israel and New Zealand, with 15% each. Overall, a higher number of men spends very long days at work: the proportion of working men working very long days in OECD countries is higher than 16% compared to women, which reaches nearly 8%.

¹⁷ Margaret O’Brien, *Work-Family Balance Policies*, Division for Social Policy and Development, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014.

¹⁸ Ida Farè, “Sapere Femminile e città della cura”, op.cit. p. 88.

of women who have given birth to a child between the ages of 34 and 44 exceeds that of 25-34 year olds (48.4% vs. 44.7%).

The sample of interviewees from the province of Trento was closer to the indications provided by the initial qualitative research module, being composed of unemployed women in the strict sense of the word (former working women who are currently unemployed), or unemployed women actively seeking professional reintegration. In this context, the correlation with “care loads” is also exact since all of them experience motherhood – the participants in the *focus groups* have up to three children aged between 1 and 19 (most of them with children between 0 and 5 years), while those involved in the in-depth interviews have children between 2 and 9 years old.

Concerning the interviews conducted in Milan, two brief considerations should be made: first, single-parents have increased throughout Europe, including Italy¹⁹, and it is not a case that in Milan the component of divorced, separated or single women among the interviewees is well represented.

The second element, which also emerged from the results of the on-line survey carried out in the territory of Milan, is the component of precarious working women: ordinary unemployment - as a status that clearly separates work from unemployment - does not concern Milan as much. Still depicting the sharp contrast between the employed and the unemployed, those that are the increasingly wider-spread forms of work at the present time are being defined as “atypical”. Permanent employment is disappearing into widespread forms of self-entrepreneurship, self-employment and *fixed-term* contracts. Faced with this new pattern, the question is whether the concept of *unemployment* can remain an effective interpretation trail. The context of Milan seems to show exactly this transformed reality, which fosters the use of new analytical categories of interpretation and, as a result, the use of new political tools²⁰.

Again, most of the interviewees in Trentino range from having an operational professional profile in the case of the *focus groups*, to playing administrative/technical and high-profile roles in the case of single interviews. In Milan, the interviewees carry out tasks varying from shop-assistants to practitioners of performing arts, from *free-lancers* to cultural mediators characterized by a greater variety of situations. The sample from Milan include three women who covered high-ranking positions in the company in which they were employed, thus confirming that unemployment certainly does not affect only those carrying out low-profile tasks.

This is obviously a reflection of the productive vocation of the territory. Regarding training, the interviewees have medium-high education up to post-graduate education in both the cases of the province of Trento and Milan: this sample confirms the national trend for recent generations, namely women pursuing higher training levels than men²¹.

¹⁹ “Between 2010 and 2020, the number of single-person households without children increased by 20 % in the EU”. Source Eurostat, *Household composition statistics*, Data extracted in May 2021 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Household_composition_statistics

²⁰ Guy Standing, *A Precariat Charter. From Denizens to Citizens*, Bloomsbury, London, New York 2014.

²¹ Cfr. Istat, “Istruzione e formazione”, year 2021: “Women perform better than men for many education and training indicators: the gap in the share of people aged 25-64 who hold at least a diploma higher, in the second quarter of 2020, is 4.7 percentage points in favor of women (64.9% among women and 60.2% among men)”.

MOTIVATIONS FOR PARTICIPATION, COMPARISON DYNAMICS

Together with the interviewees, their previous work experiences has been analyzed; the reasons linked to the current status as an unemployed or, in any case, to the lack of permanent employment; the criticalities concerning the relation with the job linked to “conciliatory” factors; the expectations regarding the search for a new job; the contradictions relating to the condition of a precarious worker and the investment in labour.

While on the one hand, work for women has acquired a growing identity-linked value, on the other hand the fact that work is a challenge for women that often leads to difficult choices is not disproved. One of the main drivers to take part in the research and to reflect on the proposed topics was the possibility of creating “opportunities for sharing and self-narration” in both territorial contexts. In Milan, most interviewees considered this to be a good opportunity for establishing relationships and receiving information on the issues discussed. Furthermore, a desire to tell their stories that reveals the need to process how they relate with the situation experienced in the present, a situation that lacks stability and planning, is also expressed. Once again, the implied experience of insecurity and fragmentation seems to encourage women to find opportunities to meet and share, exchange and be reflected in other women’s experiences. The topic of loneliness connected to the absence of a social dimension, which standard work does not allow to build, is one of the cores to be taken into account when designing services.

The women participating in the *focus groups* and interviews in the province of Trento contributed with particularly interesting elements that motivated their attendance such as:

- ✓ sense of duty, civic sense;
- ✓ trust in initiatives aimed at voicing the citizens;
- ✓ trust in the Employment Agency;
- ✓ curiosity on the subject of work-life balance.

Very useful is a reflection on how the meetings were held from the point of view of the actual “emotional participation” in the discussion. This element may substantiate the in-depth analysis interpreting the quantitative results and help in confirming and testing some working hypotheses. In the specific case, it was useful to retrieve complex information regarding motivations, attitudes, habits, experiences, knowledge and expectations regarding career path of the target group.

A first focus group in the province of Trento involving nine interviewees clarified the sense of frustration implicit in the condition of being unemployed, which often resulted as an unexpected outcome of their fair behaviour and engagement towards the employers over the years. Work is seen as a symbolic dimension capable of ensuring visibility and citizenship, as well as the cornerstone of women’s economic independence. For this reason, losing one’s job today causes a profound wound in one’s identity, also in women. It is noteworthy that in the past men were particularly affected by the condition of being laid off or redundant, namely losing their role of producers - *male breadwinners*; nowadays, instead, the experience of being excluded from the labour market

is particularly painful for women, also because “integrating care in the working dimension lifts the alleged natural character off these activities, giving them social dignity”²². Hence, the absence of work - but also job insecurity that always maintains employment below the threshold of visibility, in fact a precarious man or woman is never considered to be a worker in the full sense, so a full citizen: the interviewees from Milan declared themselves as unemployed even if employed with a precarious contract, a significant paradox of self-representation - risks reassigning women to their fate of care work in the traditional sense, undermining any possible injection of independence. Such a hazard is not only a waste of talent and energy, but also a possible missed appointment with hybridizations and social inventions that may recreate and renew roles and timings, redefine the relationships between men and women, between partners, reinterpret the limited and limiting meaning of the concept of *reconciliation* - which always refers to an effect of “gendering of policies”²³ in terms of *quality of life* for the involved social components.

During the meetings actual discouragement emerged when telling this experience, filled at times with strong emotional tensions and giving rise to situations in which the narration was interrupted because the woman speaking broke into tears.

This element leads to a reflection not only on the perceptual changes in the value of work between genders, tendentially reversing, in an interesting manner, women’s prevailing attention, which shifts from the private to the public scope, but also on the actual meaning that the loss of employment may imply in life and in a *menage* over the horizon of the crisis: not to have a job means to have no income, so it prefigures unsettling scenarios with no means to conduct a good and dignified life. From this perspective, social suffering generated by contemporary social fragility, connected to the scarcity of employment opportunities and the related intermittence, the anxiety deriving from finding another job, connected, in one word, to the *generalized existential insecurity*, should make us reflect on innovated and adequate *welfaristic* income support tools.²⁴ In summary, the phenomenon is closely related to the issue of wide-spreading impoverishment, jobs malaise and *working poor*.

²² Donatella Barazzetti, “Doppia presenza e lavoro di cura. Interrogativi su alcune categorie interpretative”, in *Quaderni di Sociologia*, n.40, 2006, pages 85-96.

²³ Camilla Gaiaschi, *Effetti e ostacoli delle pratiche di conciliazione lavoro-vita. Dalla valutazione delle politiche allo studio delle organizzazioni*, 2WEL & Centro Einaudi, 2014.

²⁴ Literature on the subject is extremely broad. We suggest the most recent texts at international level: Philippe Van Parijs, Yannick Vanderborght, *Basic income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Usa, 2017; Guy Standing, *Basic Income: And How We Can Make It Happen*, Pelican Book, London, 2017.

2. BEING MOTHERS

CARE LOADS AND QUALITATIVE ELEMENTS

The quantitative data on care loads detected with the interviews in Milan and in province of Trento highlights that care loads particularly concern children. Although care loads regarding the elderly and/or sick people with no exclusion are not so significant at present, everybody at all latitudes of the globe has clear in their own minds how relevant the issue is, is aware and tells of a scenario of commitment, hard work (but also of a desire for help and assistance) which will take different shapes once the children have grown older. The interviewees in the province of Trento stressed the current relative independence or distance from their parents and/or elderly parents-in-law. In the latter case, brief trips and visits are sometimes necessary for temporary support.

In the cases in Trento, mothers take care of their children exclusively with limited support from their relatives or paid staff. These commitments are described by the women from Milan as “*a kaleidoscope of duties and responsibilities*” when looking after children and young people. If the women who participated in the focus groups in the province of Trento showed with less force the frustration that they perceive in finding themselves alone in managing care responsibilities, the women who participated in the groups of Milan underline, especially in particular periods of our life (in case of a disease; first year of life, etc.) the mental effort of the *menage* organisation.

It is particularly significant that some of the women contacted through the agencies’ *datasets* could not attend because they had to look after their children.

In Milan, it emerged that in the case of certain professions and conditions e.g. a woman who becomes pregnant at a very young age, or due to issues related to a work schedule that is incompatible with family needs, the presence of a child becomes an *insurmountable* obstacle to continuing a job based on shifts (exemplary were the case of a health worker), as well as may prevent a person from pursuing an educational qualification.

The stories from province of Trento are equally clarifying: in particular, following the birth of the second child – according to the most traditional literature – its leads to conclude that physical and emotional efforts, economic costs, stress, etc. surpass the possible advantages of a working activity: “*I resigned - an interviewee stated - to please everyone.*”

Unsurprisingly, asking grandparents for help is widespread in Italy - the pillars of the Italian family welfare system - on top of foreign babysitters. Often, *mothers* helped their *daughters* pursue economic independence through a job, or a career, because they desided for them a different path to the one they experienced.

It is noteworthy that if the path undertaken by women caring for their elderly parents is not sufficiently considered by relevant policies, it should be highlighted that in Milan, even in the case of maternity loads at the end of primary school, women may feel like being on the brink of the abyss: the transition to secondary school (in most cases there is no canteen at school, and children return from school at times that makes organisation particularly complicated in terms of management-related efforts) is likely to create additional criticalities for families who are faced with solutions that fall on their shoulders instead of being provided with new types of municipal services.

MOTHERHOOD AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LEARNING

Motherhood is defined as an experience that *“changes your life”*, *“revolutionary”*, that turns your previous everyday life upside down but that also provides opportunities for learning new skills and a new awareness. The organisational and management, as well as economic aspects are highlighted (*“a mother is like the CEO of a large company”*) combined with primary health care, mediation between people (primarily, children), ability to concentrate also in contexts that do not allow for it, ability to perform multiple activities together without leaving something behind. Some interviewees reported that they learned to become a *“referee”* in conflict situations. Others mentioned the element of strength and of going ahead: anything, *“just do it”* if it is to be done, finding energies that you never imagined you could have. And some mothers feel like little girls once again with their children, recover and train their imagination again. The interviewees who reported that they frequently take the car to move around places out of necessity also spoke about their improved skills as drivers. In addition, they learned to save and optimise home and family care activities, also in terms of evaluation, management, spending and choice of products.

As an example, some interviewees also expressed a change in their perspectives towards working women but also towards themselves: *“I have learned to ask”* an interviewee stated. And then many proposed patience as a highly trained element in motherhood, considered to be useful in both private and work life.

3. THE ROLE OF WORK: THE RELATION BETWEEN WORK AND NEEDS IN DAILY LIFE

In general terms, both the respondents from Milan and the province of Trento acknowledged and attributed a relevant and significant value to work. A deep-rooted conviction deriving from the family, the education received, how fulfilled they are with the educational path they pursued, or the regret for not having been able to pursue one as young women. Work for the interviewees is also and above all an opportunity for self-fulfilment, satisfaction, independence, for using the skills acquired through education or work experiences, sometimes very significant in terms of duration or specific features. Those who had a direct experience acknowledged a specific value to their work experience in a company: for the flow of information, for the established rights, for the salary that is higher than elsewhere, for the chance to learn. This idealised representation is accompanied by the misogyny of their boss, cold *mobbing*, “defenestration” in the case of company mergers.

Work fosters open-mindedness, many believe that women have specific talents. In Milan, the “*social drive to working is very strong, you have to work a lot, get exhausted, a mother is actually always one step below.*” The role of a working woman is considered to legitimise being part of the urban and public fabric, that role and legitimation and visibility were narrated through various examples of city life; they try to be part of that social dimension in other ways after finishing work, by means of expert volunteering: by participating in parents’ associations at school, in the neighbourhood and *social street*, or even in environmental groups. The city culture they feel the pressure from is that of Milan’s stereotype, according to which your identity cannot be separated from your job, from your being busy, is the expression of a collective imagination that in the past, involved only men and that now involves women too.

When the women from the province of Trento - in several situations - referred to multiple identity mainly highlighted two aspects: the mother and the worker; many expressed disappointment that they had had to leave a place that was peaceful and gratifying in most cases, a living space “*for the Self*” that was also important as an alternative to the family.

Economic independence given by paid work was acknowledged by all of them as an element at its basis, has an indisputable value inherited from their mothers - being them workers or not - and is considered as a key acquired condition which does not, however, exhaust its significance. The economic independence guaranteed by a “salary” is more relevant for separated breadwinners with children; the husband/father’s check does not come through on a regular basis or does not come through at all. Some are afraid of a possible separation in the future in the event they lose a permanent job and as a result, a full salary.

Unemployment is a condition – which used to be constant - lived by the women from province of Trento that leads to make some considerations about their financial situation and income: they mentioned NASPI (monthly unemployment allowance) and other benefits as a key supporting element, which does not make up for the loss of employment but anyhow, has allowed them to facilitate their living, considering the other advantages such as free time and the possibility of being close to their children.

REFLECTING ON THE LATEST WORK EXPERIENCE

The women from the province of Trento told how motherhood conflicted with the possibility of (keeping on) working. Closing a job relationship sets, however, a split for all of them but it displays different features: some do not ask or ask for little and give up from the start without even giving it a try, while others decide to leave their job after maternity leave or after having returned to work and suffered a shock due to unexpected insulting behaviours; a part-time job – the first required option - is seen as uneconomic by employers (“6 working hours cost me like 8!”) and is strongly discouraged.

In Milan, those who worked for companies told of investment in the profession in terms of dedicated time, skilling and reskilling, feeling pleased to create new products, inventing creative solutions. When they lost their job due to bankruptcy or re-organisation, they said they felt “like someone who suffered from trauma.”

The last job they refer to is the one that has certain characteristics such as hiring with a permanent contract, or with at least a 3-year contract; many of them have insecure jobs such as three-month contracts, collaboration with professional firms, hourly contracts with cooperatives, internships, one-off collaborations of various types.

Yet, the perception of these paid activities refers to *non-work experience*; the tension is shifted to the search for a job that has the characteristics of stability and the quality the job they lost used to have; the various paid jobs they have do not provide them with self-representation as workers, which they can acknowledge as sufficient. A kind of resistance to consider work contracts and insecure jobs to be a permanent condition in their future.

PERCEIVED CONSEQUENCES OF LOSING A JOB

For the women from the province of Trento, for whom the connection between motherhood/job loss appeared to be causal, ending their working relationship stirred up very strong feelings: they felt guilty, discomforted, resentful, useless, disoriented, disappointed, discouraged, humiliated, frustrated in relation to the employer and the professional situation *tout court*. If the relationship ended after a long-term negotiation or sharing of opinions, a temporary sense of liberation was also experienced, however, it remained bitter and transitional; they shared the experience of feeling lonely, abandoned in relation to a context that could not provide support, a way of finding themselves an outlet, also a – perhaps, above all - personal rather than only a professional support. The interviewees acknowledged that they would have needed it to manage a painful time in their lives with less efforts.

The women from Milan described the period after losing their regular jobs as a time lasting for years, even when it was alternated with temporary jobs in between, a time of emotional and organisational insecurity, which required inner processing as if losing a job “was a bereavement”. Losing one’s job leads some to conceal - they recalled - the new condition even to their children. The vulnerability they feel comes out this way too.

Some pointed out how critical the data on age is: those who are over 40 feel like they are slipping into 50, the age they perceive as the excluding threshold, so anxiety concentrates on the present; they see that threshold as a time to take stock of all of it. They are well aware of the double-factor limitation: gender and age!

TIME AND THE TOOLS TO SEARCH FOR JOB OPPORTUNITIES

The most common feelings associated with the active search for a job that cannot be found felt by the interviewees in the two territories are lacking self-confidence, demoralisation, fear, anxiety. The desire to fulfil themselves “in something”, to be independent and self-sufficient, to be able to rely on higher financial support than that granted by one income is what motivates them the most.

The representation of the role as a housewife appears critical for most women who previously had an acknowledged “full-time” job, the current role is something they did not choose, which makes them look like unemployed - a description they perceive as malevolent. An image that undermines self-esteem and self-image, which they will have to take back control of when they are integrated in the labour market again, then housework is rejected: “*I told my husband: I’m not cut out for being a housewife*”; it is not considered as a role their daughters can play as grown-ups; participation in the housework by family members (adolescent children, husband, grandparents) has “*regressed, exhausted*” since they have been at home.

Women live a common experience in this phase when they try to reposition themselves, that is the feeling of being discriminated as workers and judged as non-workers: a vicious and paradoxical circle, of which there is no way out. Inadequacy, the idea of being “wrong” emerges clearly. There were also those who claimed to feel desperate or non-existent, as if they had become transparent and useless despite their previous high-level professional life with excellent results. Some added a different experience, some felt “*first-rate*” because they rediscovered new opportunities, their skills, the beauty in things – a feeling they would have lost if caught in a life lived at a faster pace and in other commitments.

Going a little bit deeper, when the atmosphere became more intimate, a new order of priorities against the choice of a possible and desired job emerged for those women who have no urgent economic needs. A new way of “selecting” resulting also from the experience they had been living.

Many have been the experiences of the working women from both the province of Trento and Milan with the Job Services over the years; they allowed us to express wide-ranging considerations on both the requests for services and the services they have - or have not – benefited from. They communicated that they perceived some services as unsatisfactory, or even poor, in terms of the organisation and the content: they report variability in the range of the operators’ competences (in both the public and the private sector) as being not always appropriate; other types of services they experienced and experimented, as outlined below, were supportive, even though never decisive in achieving the goal of finding a new job.

The true great weakness attributed to the system delivering these services is easily identified by all of them in the lack of a match with the labour market: they are committed to finding a new job and consider these services as allies, and finding out that their contribution does not go all the way up to establishing a direct contact with the employers is a bitter surprise.

They are considered at best as valid experiences to escape isolation and to get into contact with the Agency (Afol and Employment Agency) again, but not useful for finding a job: a path that does not lead to the constantly changing labour market.

TRAIL AND TOOLS

On-line accessibility of many services is considered by all participants a positive datum but the direct contact with the male and female operators from the Job Service system gave rise to different opinions. These different opinions could be related to the quality of the time spent together and the type of service delivered. What will be etched in their memory the most is the hardships, criticalities and delays along the way (often also due to the changing regulations) arisen when interacting with the operators for the administrative aspects and red tape e.g. accessing and maintaining NASPI allowance. On the contrary, the role of the tutors manages to fulfil that necessary element of proximity, continuity and attention at the basis of a personal and personalised relationship (they remembered their names and understood their working conditions).

The Curriculum Vitae is considered as an important tool, but the use recruiters make of it is so unsatisfactory. Along the pathway within the services, some were able to re-design their CV or draw a first skills profile, but these supports did not provide very useful instruments, in the opinion of the interviewees from the province of Trento. The interviewees from Milan called for a stronger model of schooling, namely assessing individually the changes made following the indications, the assistance of a tutor along each step, although they considered it more as a “due” than an effective means.

Regarding the training offer and upgrading courses, the organisational methods of the courses in the two territories are different, the experiences are different.

In the opinion of the women from Milan, the course on Women’s Empowerment carried out at Afol built the bond that many have with the institution, they all mentioned it as a real opportunity for developing knowledge, skills - on that occasion they received psychological help in a hard time; they appreciated many aspects of that (experimental) course: plural-approach teaching, group composition; the trail undertaken with the teacher and the tutor was sufficiently tailored to their needs, resolute in terms of expanding the range of areas where to try to propose professional initiatives; indications from the tutor to identify specific and targeted sites on their profile. It is considered by all to be a support to address the insecurity areas considered as “transversal”. In their opinion, that course directed only to the women, with female teachers, recreated an environment that is typical of the groups of women: that fosters sharing, acknowledgement of a force often denied.

Each course offered the opportunity for establishing a new *network*, expanding the exchange of information and emotional support.

In most cases, the women from the province of Trento attended training activities delivered by the Employment Agency for the purpose of observing the terms and the conditionality of the *welfare* measures they were benefiting from. Courses, workshops or upgrading courses delivered ideas and partially interesting information because they did not focus on their specific interests and training needs. Furthermore, the organisational methods, the timing and frequency often did not comply very well with their family commitments, and sometimes heavily impacted also the financial aspect: so, for example, to attend a course to maintain the NASPI

allowance, you are forced to use a significant part of that benefit to pay a *baby sitter*. Other critical points mentioned a disconnection between their expectations and the offer they received; selection criteria for participation that did not consider their skills; trainees with different work experiences and backgrounds, a factor that slowed down and reduced learning opportunities.

Some women from Milan were offered the “Dote Unica Lavoro”, namely an initiative of the Lombardia Region implemented with the contribution of the European Social Fund intended to foster support for professional requalification and integration in the labour market through job services and free training activities, tailored according to individual criticalities and professional needs in the search for a job. It foresees the possibility for the person to benefit from a basket of services that is instrumental to the needs for qualification and/or integration in the labour market, whose value is determined by a renewed profiling model that takes into account gender, age and career of every single unemployed person. The women who benefited from it were satisfied with the service, they received care and they attended training courses. Some women complained about not being given the chance to give *feedback* at the end of the trail.

In relation to the use of social media for the search for new job opportunities, the interviewees from Milan observed that using specific web platforms on supply and demand facilitates the direct contact with the employers, it is a method that provides complete information and quick access – although they realised in the end that you are not actually “*helped, rather just contacted.*” For the younger ones, these web sites ensure “*security instead of door-to-door*”, many think that you have to visit these portals every day, some others feel that deciphering the information is difficult.

Others are afraid, sceptical and convinced that the interesting jobs are not found *on-line* and the time spent in front of a screen is just wasted! Finally, they quickly realised that browsing from one site to the other requires specific skills: thus, the need for an expert – a tutor or other – who gives assistance and provides the “*search keys*” re-emerged.

4. CONTRIBUTION OF THE ONLINE SURVEY

During the opportunities for meeting and sharing with the women from the area of Milan and the province of Trento, a survey was launched to gather data concerning men and women about:

- Knowledge of the services aimed at children, adolescents, the elderly and people with disabilities in their proximity territories;
- Attribution of varying importance to these services starting from one's own needs;
- Knowledge and experience of tools to reconcile work and family life;
- Exploration on the perception of effectiveness of some tools for reconciliation.

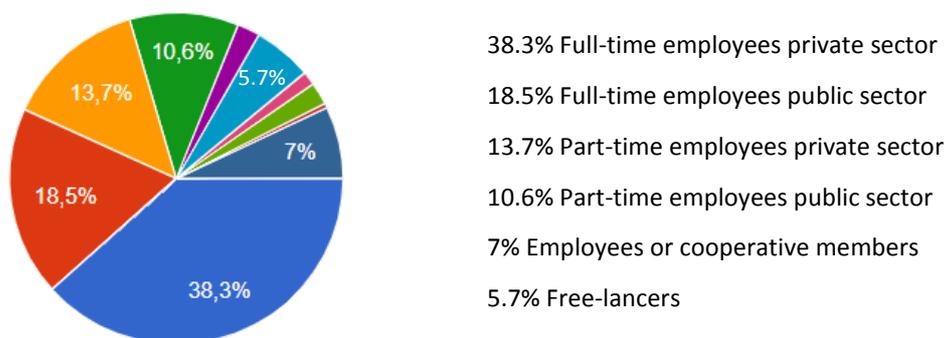
Even if the survey was formally conducted in disconnection from the territories included in the MASP research, the Agencies and CGM, the coordinator of this action who operates in the area of the Municipality of Milan, guided its implementation. This is the reason why most of the 308 participating men and women answered from the province of Trento and Lombardia region. The women are 80.5% of the total.

Regarding the age of the group of participants: around 42% are people between 30 and 40; 36% between 41 and 50 years; 8% are people over 50 and 14% are young people under 29. By breaking down by gender, men are slightly more represented in the 30-40 age group and in those under 29 years. Adult people answered the questions of the online survey.

JOB AND CARE

The figure below shows the distribution of the different types of employment for men and women participants that were employed in 65.6% cases

Fig. 1 Type of employment

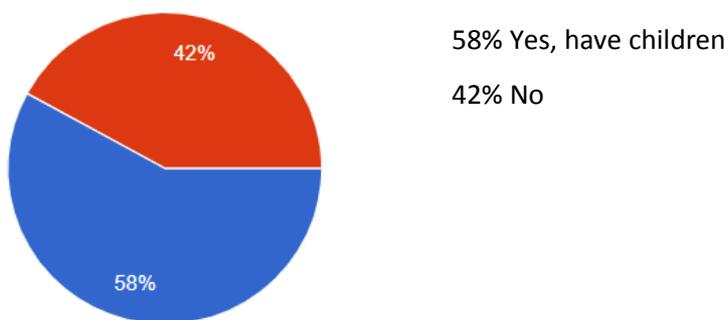


Therefore, those who work have full-time employee contracts in 56.8% cases and part time in 24.3%.

Taking only the women into consideration, the percentage of employed goes down to 63%: more in detail, the percentage of women that are full-time employees in the public or private sector raises to 58%, as the percentage of part-time contracts for women that is 26%. There are no significant differences in the free lancers and cooperative members.

Over 36% of the people who declared to be unemployed were unemployed for no longer than 6 months, more or less equally distributed between women and men, the most alarming percentage concerns gender distribution of medium and longer time unemployment: woman that are unemployed from 12 to 24 months are the 98% of total, and the same if we take into consideration unemployed condition from more than 2 years.

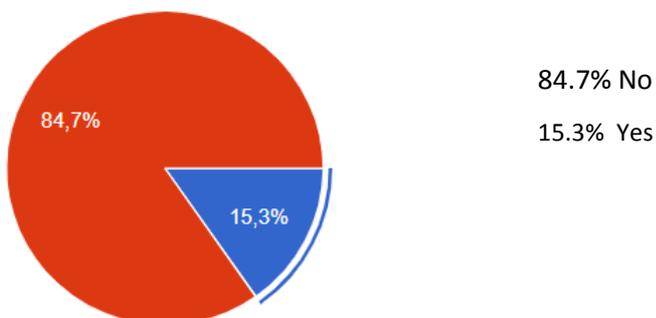
Fig. 2 Children



More of half of the people (58%) declared to have children but if the data is broken down by gender considering those who have children, women are 90%, they have 2 children in 58% of cases and 3 in 12%.

The youngest sample (between 25 and 29 years) has no children, 5% of those who are between 30 and 35 have children; 50% of those aged between 35 and 40 have children, while the incidence of those over 40 with children reaches 75%.

Fig. 3 Elderly to care



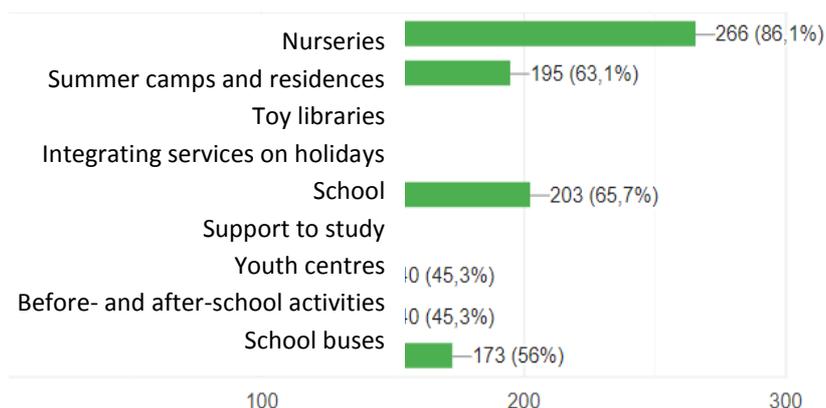
The participants declare that they take care of elderly persons in 15.3% cases, but even in this case women take care of 80% of total. This data seems to be in line with the age of the group of participants who, although adults, are not yet in the condition of the "sandwich generation". Among women who care for elderly people,

one third takes care of two people. There is instead 7% of the total sample that takes care of a non self-sufficient person. Also in this case women represent almost all.

THE TERRITORIAL MAP

The Survey tabled the topic of work life balance partially separated from a reflection on the territorial services and their need/benefit, thus trying to better highlight what a male/female citizen (intended as an active subject and main actor of welfare planning) perceives and processes regardless of the employment relationship. The topic of work life balance explicitly refers to the relationship of the person with the company given that it is linked to being a working man/woman, so as to explore in details the services delivered across the territories and to liaise them with work life balance intended to highlight the close existing correlation.

Fig. 4 Which of the following services (public or private) directed to minors and adolescents, are present in your neighbourhood/community?



Once the map of services and those that were nevertheless communicated to be existing across the territory was drawn, people were asked to express the varying importance assigned to each of them (on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 = not at all and 5 = very much). This phase clearly brought out some social needs. Regardless of the actual presence e.g. of care loads for people with disabilities or the elderly, the answers referred to people's capacity of thinking themselves as part of a community, whose needs are collective and not only individual.

Finding that over 65% assigned nurseries a level of importance between 5 and 4 confirms an explicit need, while the fact that over 49% of people assigned the same maximum level of importance to activities supporting education, 60% to before- and after-school activities, 55% to youth centres, makes explicit an overview of the needs to be met in daily life.

It is in the management of everyday life, of the ordinary and not of the extraordinary life that people (and women as the majority sample in the Survey) find once again the resources to plan, build, train and get involved in social life.

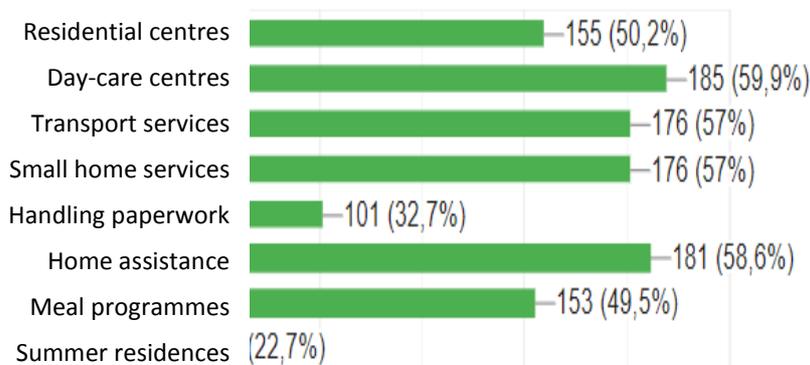
In this regard, the topic of reconciling personal life, care loads, work experience, business needs requires to be tackled by a number of actors in synergy among them.

The topic turns out to be a rather vast and complex one in view of its interconnection with the principles of equality, equal opportunities and non-discrimination, both in the productive sector and in the family sector. As evidence of its complexity, it is noteworthy that initially the political, institutional and legal debate was characterized by an approach that considered work life balance to be instrumental to increase women’s employment, until the Legislator – by means of maternity leave and the promotion of positive actions directed to both working men and women - demonstrated - even if not yet sufficiently - to consider work life balance as a “container of neutral rights”.²⁵

Reconciling work and family life affects not only the personal sphere but also public, corporate and social policies towards work organisation that take into account the human-resources needs, as well as the territory that can support and integrate services, in order to organise city times.

Again, the Survey shows the importance of territorial services aimed at the elderly (who yet, do not represent a care load for the sample of respondents) handling paperwork and delivering small home services - over 56% of respondents consider it to be extremely or very important; over 69% identify a transport service to be extremely important, while over 30% consider residential centres to be not important at all.

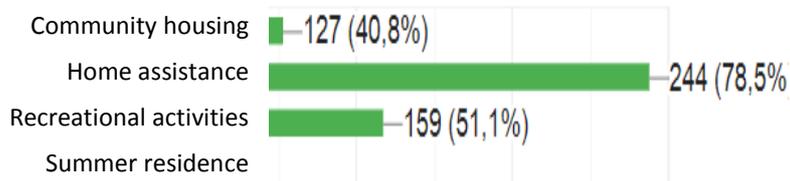
Fig. 5 Which of the following services (public or private) directed to the elderly, are present in your neighbourhood/community?



Once again, there is a dimension where everyday life (taking a relative for a medical check-up or taking care of small administrative matters for them) is a hindrance or criticality when managing timing in relation to work timing.

²⁵ The Legislator’s perspective focused on protecting only employed biological working mothers for a long time, and has appropriately expanded in recent years; this way, new guidelines on protection have been identified, on the one hand addressed to the realisation of a more inclusive perspective (by extending rights - albeit variously modulated - also to fathers, adoptive and foster parents and autonomous working women), while from the other oriented to pay due attention to a parental role considered *in se*, freed from a “gender” connotation, also enhancing, as a result, the central role of the subjects receiving care and their physiological, as well as emotional and relational needs.

Fig. 6 Which of the following services (public or private) directed to non self-sufficient people, are present in your neighbourhood/community?



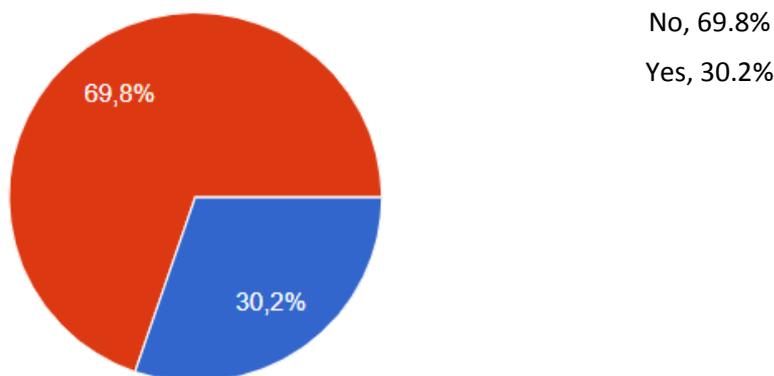
The recognition of the territorial services aimed at assisting non self-sufficient people brings out:

- many answers in the "other" field in which people have chosen to report their lack of knowledge;
- a stronger desirability of the housing communities than the perceived presence on their own territory;
- a strong demand for summer stays.

CITY TIMES

Time is the central topic: it takes time to do (physically) but also to be there (not only physically) in a relationship, for the people we care for, in our responsibilities for care and assistance. In this regard, the lack of an actual and tangible impact on the best time management of daily life activities leads us to take into consideration the many negative answers to the question "Do you know of any initiatives of work life balance?"

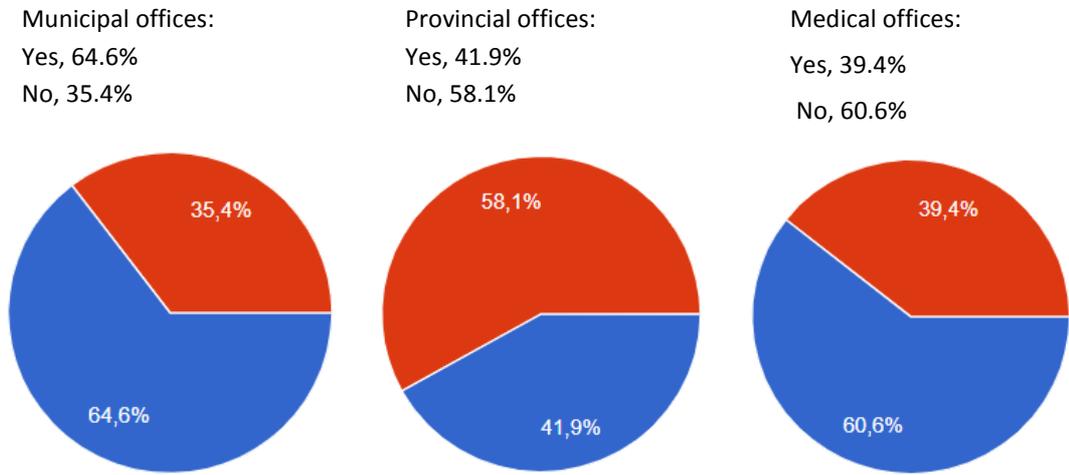
Fig. 7 Do you know of any initiatives of work life balance?



In the section dedicated to city policies and times, the Survey reveals that commercial activities are those operating according to a time schedule that makes them the most accessible (81.3% of people consider them usable), followed by chemists' (80.7%), public transport (74.2%) and post offices (68.8%).

Municipal, provincial and medical offices are perceived in different ways:

Fig. 8 Flexible hours or online services



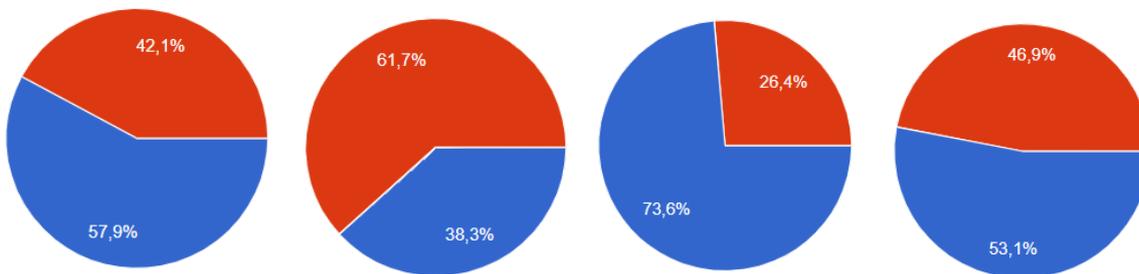
CORPORATE WELFARE

Finally, moving to the section dedicated to “corporate welfare”, the answers define a cross-section that separates two major topics, namely time flexibility and services and tools available for the employees. Flexible working hours - even if still in a very traditional way - are a fairly tangible and well-established reality, the performed services actually open on a more distressing scenario: if on the one hand, the public sector through its territorial and transport services manages to reach out for the people who live their everyday experience, on the other everyday work life does not enable to access any other types of services. Corporate welfare has not actually responded to the issue of work life balance, although in recent years initiatives - also at legislative level - have been undertaken to try to achieve reconciliation between the private and the working spheres by means of positive actions: measures aimed at supporting those who have parental or family responsibilities by removing the hindrances to the implementation of the principle of substantial equality.

Concerning flexible working hours, in brief, the answers to the question “*In your current or last job, are (or were) the following forms of time and organisational flexibility present?*” were that 57.9% could benefit from working time flexibility to start/finish work; 73.6% had the possibility of doing a part-time job; 53.1% had a flexible lunch break. When it comes to the ability to customise working times, the percentage drops to 38.3%. This first set of questions and answers gives us information about how companies or institutions managed to include the most traditional tools on flexible working hours, but refers to a Fordist conception of work organisation, according to which a male/female employee is bound to forms of standardised management.

Fig. 9 Flexibility in the last work experience

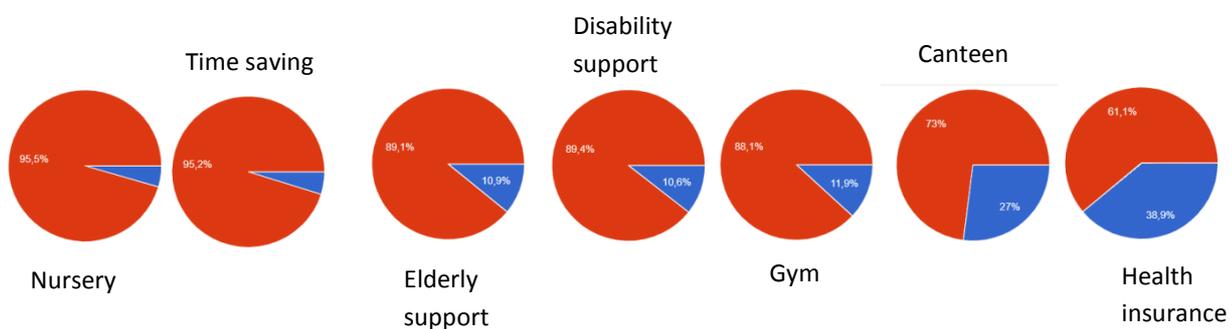
Flexibility to start/finish: Yes, 57.9% No, 42.1%	Customise time: Yes, 38.3% No, 61.7%	Part time: Yes, 73.6% No, 26.4%	Flexible lunch: Yes, 53.1% No, 46.9%
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The second set of questions and answers leads on the scenario of customisation also of the ways of managing work goals and presents a different picture. Only 28.3% of respondents experienced the possibility of attending a remotely managed meeting; 17.7% telework; 28.3% fluent working process/*smart work*.

We report hereby the data that emerged about the available services for the employees.

Fig. 10 Corporate welfare (red=No; blu= Yes)



In this case, the topic of time management takes on the connotation of everyday working life e.g. a company canteen was not available according to 73% of work experiences; a company nursery or/and a toy library were not a delivered service in 95.5% of cases; there were no external agreements to benefit from care services for the elderly or people with disabilities in 89% of the answers; commonly defined “well-being” services such as gyms or available green spaces for relaxing were experienced only in 11.9% of cases; the range of positive answers decreases even more when the question concerns the existing “time-saving” services such as the “corporate butler”, doing little errands, paying bills, etc. since 95% of respondents have never benefited from this possibility.

Supplementary health insurance schemes are the only option reaching 38.9% of the sample.

EMERGING NEEDS AND PROPOSALS

This closing section of the Report intends to give an overview of the qualitative information emerged both from the focus groups and the in-depth interviews, as well as from the on-line survey during the research phase, so as to build upon a more analytical framework of what emerged in terms of demands/needs and proposals formulated on the basis of the skills.

SYNERGIES TO ACHIEVE WORK LIFE BALANCE EFFECTIVELY

Concerning the general introductory question about the services and devices they deemed necessary, the interviewees considered those for children in the first place: their quality and the not excessive time that their children spend on them are two reflections associated with their descriptions. The question needed to be explained more clearly when referring to policies, actions, supports specifically aimed at them as women, unemployed, mothers. Concerning the first ones, experiences with nurseries, kindergartens, museums, oratories, camps, libraries were mentioned.

Women turn their expectations to services that support them in childcare, especially in the area where they live: nurseries, nursery schools, canteens for secondary school students. These are services currently insufficient, expensive, subject to too many administrative-bureaucratic rules. Their home and environment play a central role seeing that it gives them that continuity that their job does not offer. The most critical issue relates to the difficult access to nurseries - it is considered as a “very serious” problem.

The need to have a direct contact with the business area and companies was reported, in order to know them and make themselves known: internships were frequently mentioned as a valuable complement, as an opportunity for on-the-job training and mutual understanding between employers and female employees. Internships are as devices that do not depend on the limits (below) imposed by age.

The issue of expanding existing welfare tools turned out to be also relevant when the need for greater inclusion was acknowledged.

Indications that develop the experience achieved by most interviewees emerged such as:

Services for women who lost their jobs

- ✓ Availability of spaces for meeting and sharing with other women also with the support of professional consultants who foster the discussion and lead towards *empowerment*;
- ✓ Networks bringing talents to the network;
- ✓ *Counselling* services focusing on dealing with the issues emerging during the initial period after losing a job, so as to process the radical change from being a busy worker to unemployed.

Services for working women

- ✓ Paying attention to the working woman even before she becomes a mother: an authoritative profile of moderator/facilitator is considered to be useful, already when a woman informs her employer that she is pregnant, in order to evaluate new and compatible organisational possibilities for both and have the time to plan everything at its best by finding any additional resources or methods that allow for a satisfactory balance for the parties involved;
- ✓ A guide for those working women who will become mothers containing all the elements made available for them, in order to support them in reconciling and acknowledging motherhood as a period of activity: many women reported the lack of information and how *Whats App* groups with other mothers are the first source for collecting and sharing useful elements in support of motherhood or parenting in general. There is the actual risk that some information is not accessible such as the contribution to social security cover for childcare, a measure that is often ignored.

Strengthening legislative measures

- ✓ Obligation for both parents to benefit from hours/days off work or parental leave so that the birth of a child becomes a shared responsibility.

Organisation and company services

- ✓ Involvement of the personnel during a long leave due to care (attending meetings, sending official communications, possibility of logging in the company's email box also from home, etc.)
- ✓ Flexible part-time working hours for care needs;
- ✓ Possibility to use parental leave in different stages or in a customised manner;
- ✓ Specific formulas to support fatherhood;
- ✓ Planning to avoid too heavy workloads after being off work for a long period of time (in terms of general workloads, urgent deadlines to be met, etc.);
- ✓ Specific attention to handover of the work before and after leave;
- ✓ Company nurseries and other spaces such as toy libraries, as well as *baby-sitting*.



This publication has received financial support from the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014- 2020).

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