**Istanbul Technical University Women’s Studies Center (ITU-WSC)**

**Working Paper Series on**

**Work-Family Balance and Gender Equality:**

**A North-South Policy Perspective[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**TAKING ADVANTAGE OF AUSTERITY: THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND CARE IN SPAIN**

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***February 2014***

**Abstract**

The paper focuses on the effects of the 2008 economic crisis on care work in Spain. It analyzes the extent to which the crisis has affected earlier trends and brought about new developments in care giving. It shows that, even before the crisis, reconciliation policies were focusing on the distribution of care work within the family or they were leaning on the family to "professionalize" care work. The paper's main argument is that the crisis has been used as a way to justify the low implementation path that was being followed even before the crisis and to water down many of the policies that had been adopted since 1999. Using primary statistical sources and complementary information from interviews, we show that the implementation of these laws and the processes initiated in 1999 have been seriously weakened and, in some cases, even reversed by the crisis, with negative consequences for gender equality.

**1. Introduction**

The main argument in this paper is that the economic crisis that has hit Spain since 2008 has become an obstacle and a turning point in the implementation of the policies that had been adopted during the previous decade on the issue of balancing family and labor market work (reconciliation policies) as well as on gender equality. The paper argues that, indeed, the obstacles to implementation that had already been present before the crisis have become commonplace as a result of it. In addition, austerity policies are making progress towards gender equality more difficult.

From the early post-Franco or post 1975 period to the 2008 economic crisis, two different stages can be distinguished in the relationship between women’s paid and unpaid work. The first began with the initial steps of the democratic regime and was still heavily influenced by the dictatorship characterized by the indoctrination of women into their role as wives and mothers, the state protection of the male breadwinner model, and important legal limitations to women’s paid work (Benería 1977; Nash 1994; Valiente 1996). In this initial period, the problem of reconciling family and labor market work was not considered part of the socio-political agenda, nor of feminist demands. During the thirty-five years of Franco's regime (1940-75), women's participation in paid work was very low, as was also during the first decade of post-Franco period: [[3]](#footnote-3) although women's participation rate increased gradually, it remained below 35% until the 1990s, with clearly large differences between older and younger women under 25 whose participation rate was much higher.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Given that most women were not in the paid labor force and that most basic rights had not been recognized for women during Franco's dictatorship, the feminist movement, during this initial stages of the transition period, first focused on the recognition of civil and sexual rights, rather than on work-related rights. This implied demands centered on changes in civil law such as the legalization of divorce and abortion, or the abolition of discriminatory practices regarding the issue of "illegitimate" children. There was also an effort to set up social services through local governments; the first democratically elected town councils were charged with the provision of new services for women such as advice centers, birth-control provision and shelters. The expanded agenda of gender-related issues also led to the creation of new policy-making offices in the central administration, and eventually to the creation of the Instituto de la Mujer (Women's Institute) at the national level as well as of its representative offices throughout the country (Threlfall, Cousins and Valiente 2005). Also, beginning in 1988, new legislation on equality was planned under the strong influence of the European Union (Astelarra 2005). Some women’s groups campaigned for a more egalitarian presence of women in the public sphere, and they organized campaigns against women's exploitative working conditions and gender segregation in the labor market. However, given that the relatively low representation of women in the paid labor force, these demands did not get much attention until the mid-1990s. Left-over family policies from the Franco regime were rejected by progressive and democratic groups as long as they were considered part of his pro-natalist and anti-feminist heritage (Valiente 1996). Thus, during the 1975-mid-1990s period, work and family life balance was a secondary issue in the feminist agenda (Astelarra 2005).

The second post-Franco period thus began in the mid-1990s and can be considered to have lasted until the outburst of the 2008 crisis. During this period, Spain made important legislative efforts on reconciliation and on gender equality (Benería and Martinez-Iglesias 2010). One of the initial laws was the 1999 “Law to Promote the Reconciliation Between Family and Working Life”, which was in fact introduced by a conservative government of the PP (Partido Popular) party. The law regulated parental care leaves, and extended the reduction in hours of work to facilitate the care of children and elderly. It also extended leaves for both men and women. A second piece of legislation was the “Law of Dependency” introduced by the Socialist government in 2006. It represented an important turning point because it introduced the notion of “care” as part of citizens’ right and as an obligation to provide it for the disabled and the elderly on the part of the state. Up to that point, dependent people were mostly taken care of by women from their family but the law took note of “the changes in the family and the progressive entrance of women in the paid labor force that introduced new variables that require[d] a revision of the traditional [family] model” (see below).

A third piece of legislation was the so-called “Ley Orgánica para la Igualdad Efectiva entre Hombres y Mujeres” or Law of Effective Equality Between Men and Women (2007). Introduced also by the Socialist Government, its point of departure was the emphasis on the gap between formal recognition of gender equality and its actual achievement. The law underlined the multiple obstacles to reaching full and effective gender equality -such as violence against women, sexual harassment at the workplace, and gender discrimination in the media- including the problem of reconciling family and labor market work. It should be pointed out that all these laws regarding care policies were highly influenced by the directives established by the European Union, such as Directive 96/34/CE --regarding the non-transferable father’s leave, meaning that only fathers can take it-- and Directive 2002/CE/73 –about the application of the principle of equality between men and women in matters of employment, training, promotion, and working conditions. In addition, since the turn of the century, different institutions within the EU emphasized the need to reconcile paid work and family life within the framework of promoting gender equality and women’s employment. For example, the Lisbon summit (2002) included for the first time a specific target of 60% for the female employment rate by 2010. It also required member states to expand childcare provision. Likewise, the Barcelona EU Council of March 2002 adopted quantitative guidelines for the provision of childcare, so that the available services would be sufficient to cover 33% of children under 3 and 90% of children between 3 and mandatory school age, also by 2010(Rubery 2002). Thus, at least in the case of Spain, the EU had a positive influence in terms of recognizing care work and promoting policies of redistributing it between women and men.

Domestic factors also played an important part in the adoption of this legislation. Since the mid-1990´s, there was a dramatic decrease in the number of families functioning within the breadwinner model, a growing demand of eldercare among the ageing population, and other important demographic changes such as the rise in single parent families and in the divorce rate. All of these changes intensified the demands for formal child and elderly care, resulting in the growth of formal day care services for the aging population and of childcare. Underlying these changes, a strong women’s movement that began in the post-Franco era played an important role in promoting gender equality in the public agenda, with an important focus on work-family reconciliation during the end of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century.

Although these legislative measures introduced important changes, in some cases they barely got off the ground such as with the 2006 Law of Dependency. In this paper, we argue that the economic crisis has intensified the obstacles for implementation, not only for financial reasons given the extent of cuts in social services but also because it has beeen used as an excuse for relegating gender equality to the back wagon. This happened for example with the elimination of the Ministry of Equality by the Socialist government in 2010; even more so, as will be shown later, the shift of the government to the right with the 2011 elections reinforced this tendency, for example by reopening some debates around the abortion law and the right of gay couples to get married.[[5]](#footnote-5) This shift in fact represents the beginning of a new period, characterized by "familization" --making the family more responsible for its care needs-- and by lower demand for formal care as we explain below.

In what follows, we look, first at the historical changes in women's labor force participation since the 1990s and their effects on the provision and demand for formal care. We discuss the erosion of the breadwinner model and the factors that have affected this process. We also argue that the increase in women’s labor force participation after the crisis has not generated a corresponding demand for formal care as it did before. Second, we describe the different policies --introduced above-- that were adopted regarding reconciliation and carework, and we analyze the extent to which the adopted measures responded to the laws' objective to "defamilize" care. i.e., to make it less dependent on the family. Third, we look into the changes in the organization of care work and argue that, for some women, the crisis has implied an intensification of both childcare and elderly care while there has also been a convergence in the distribution of care time between men and women. Finally, we show that the importance of family networks has increased as a result of budget cuts and reduction of public services. Empirically, the paper uses statistical data from published sources and some complementary information from in-depth interviews with key persons in trade unions and public services employees dealing with childcare and elderly care.

**2. Women's Labor Force Participation and Demand for Formal Care**

The most significant change regarding women’s employment in Spain since its transition to democracy took place from the mid-1990s to 2008. In a typical fashion, the majority of women in the past had tended to leave the labor market when they had children and to return when child rearing was over, but this trend changed dramatically, particularly since 2000. The proportion of mothers working in the labor market increased progressively so that, according to data from the UN European Economic Commission, 56.7% of mothers with children below 3 and 60% of those with children between 3 and 17 had paid employment by 2006 (UNECE 2012). Likewise, the number of double income couples with children under 6 increased by 27% between 1990 and 2008 while those in which the father was the sole breadwinner decreased by 26.8% (See Fig. 1). By 2007, just before the crisis, the number of couples with children under 6 with both parents working full time (38.1%) or with the father working full time and the mother part time (16.8% ) was greater than those in which only the men worked (37%). These changes made more obvious the problems regarding the double burden of work for women who faced the pressures of employment and work at home, particularly since there was practically no change in their domestic responsibilities.

**Figure 1: Couples with both partners aged 25-49 and children under 6, by working pattern (%).**

Source: UNECE-Gender Statistics (2012)

Several factors stand out behind the increase in mothers’ participation in paid work. First, it was linked with rapidly changing gender norms but also with the need for families to maintain their standard of living; given that men’s real wages have remained stagnant or have decreased for many labor groups overtime (O´Farrell 2010; ILO 2008), the need for women's paid work became crucial for many families. As in other countries, women’s earnings and especially mothers' has been an important contribution to family income, particularly during a period of rising consumption.

The second factor had to do with the dramatic change in Spanish society towards the notion that both men and women should contribute to family income and to the care of the household and family. As reported by Tobio (2005), in the 1980s a fairly large majority (61%) of the population was not in favor of having mothers with small children participate in the labor market, and 40% was opposed to married women’s employment. Yet, by 2004, a survey showed that only 17. 3% agreed totally or partially with the notion that “men’s duty is to earn income for the family while women’s duty is to take care of domestic work” (CIS 2004). The same survey showed that almost 93% of the Spanish population agreed totally or partially with the notion that “men and women should contribute to the care of the household and family” (although the question of “whether they should contribute equally” was not asked). Finally, a more recent survey showed that a large majority (77.8%) among the young preferred a family where “both parents share labor market and household work” (Delgado 2007). Although these changes took place especially among the young, they also reflect a collective change in consciousness among older people. This implies that the turning point in consciousness can be viewed as having both an ideological and an economic base. Finally, as already mentioned, the women’s movement has been a crucial factor that has fed many of these transformations; it has contributed to raising the political consciousness of women and it has exercised multiple pressures for women's greater autonomy and policy changes towards gender equality.

Along with the dramatic erosion of the breadwinner model among the young generation and the shift in women’s relationship to paid work, other demographic changes have taken place since the late 1990s, with important consequences for women's unpaid work. The increase in the aging population has expanded the need for elderly care, putting more pressure on family care. As Fig. 2 shows, the percentage of the population above 64 rose gradually, especially during the period 1985-2000. Relevant studies show that the traditional Spanish model of care based on family support in which women had the major responsibility became increasingly more problematic and questioned (Durán 2006; Pérez-Orozco 2005) since it was based on the assumption of non-attachment of women to the labor force.[[6]](#footnote-6) This picture no longer applied to the new generation of women who found more difficult to care for children and the increasing number of the elderly. In many ways, this is one of the reasons behind the dramatic decrease in fertility rates in Spain. According to Eurostat, Spain's average fertility rate declined from 2.86 in 1970 to 2.21 in 1980, and it plummeted to 1.16 in 1996, considerably below the replacement rate; by 2011, it was 1.36.[[7]](#footnote-7)

### Figure 2: Percentage of the population over 64, Spain 1975-2011.



Source: *Indicadores demográficos básicos.* (INE, 2012)

Other important demographic changes have been the rise in the divorce rate and in the number of single parent families. The crude divorce rate increased from 0.6 in 1999 to 2.2 in 2011 (EUROSTAT 2012)[[8]](#footnote-8) while the proportion of single parent families rose by 73.6% between 2001 and 2007 (INE 2012). This suggests an enormous social transformation in Spanish society during the past three decades but also the greater economic autonomy of women --reflected especially in the life experiences and family values of the younger generations with respect to education, marriage, childbearing and eldercare. At the same time, women's relationship with paid work has become more permanent and it has increased the pressure for policies dealing with issues of reconciliation, labor rights, gender equality and more formal care services for children and the elderly.

One consequence of these trends has been that the supply of formal care services for children and the elderly has increased since the 1990s, both public and private, even though the increase does not cover the demand for formal care. As an example, formal childcare enrolment among 0-2 year-olds rose from 3.3% in 1991) to 30.7% in 2012; and, between 2001 and 2011, the coverage rate for elderly residential care went up to 4.38% although still remaining below 5% --the rate recommended by the World Health Organization. At the same time, social norms around family care have been challenged and transformed, such as the notion that using public or private services amounted to abandoning children and the elderly. As a result, families in fact see very positively the impact of early education, which has resulted in the very high registration rates of children between 3 and five years of age (Benería and Martínez Iglesias 2010). It is therefore no surprise that the Spanish debates about balancing family and labor market work represented an important shift in public discourse that became very heated during the period that preceded the economic crisis. For example, the laws regarding reconciliation were widely discussed in the media, particularly among feminist groups who were concerned about the insufficiency of the laws adopted and about their implementation (see below). At the same time, caring and the care economy became, and continue to be, very central topics of feminist research and of discussion in academic circles (Carrasco y Dominguez 2001; Torns, Borrás and Carrasquer, 2004; Tobio 2005; Duran 2006; Pérez Orozco 2006; Benería and Martínez 2010)

Since the financial crisis hit the US in 2008, its expansion to Europe was felt very quickly. In Spain, the explosion of the construction bubble was initially its most visible effect. Unemployment in the sector grew very rapidly, particularly among men, and it soon expanded into other sectors with mostly male employment such as car production. Women's unemployment did not begin to rise until the service sector was affected, particularly when austerity programs and budget cuts in health and education were implemented. As Fig 3 shows, women's unemployment rate had caught up with the male rate by 2010 and it has continued to increase since then. In terms of labor force participation rates, the male rate declined from 68.4% in 2008 to 66.8% 2012 while women's rate actually has increased from 49.7 to 53.3 during the same period. Since 2008, the decrease in the number of women not in the labor force was important due to the decline in the number of housewives (a total of 925. 900), particularly among those over 50 (INE, 2012).

This remarkable contrast between men and women can be explained by a variety of factors. Given that, traditionally, Spanish women had been the main caregivers, the increase in women’s market work should have generated a demand for formal care as it did during the previous decade. However, the available information suggests that the opposite tendency --i.e., no increase in the demand for care-- prevailed. Several reasons for this tendency can be mentioned:

First, the figures on women’s increase in labor force participation can be explained by the new incorporation into labor force statistics of women being paid under the Dependency Law as *nonprofessional caregivers* to take care of the elderly or/and dependents at home. From 2008 to 2012, 165.043 women were granted this new status to care for dependent family members, 56% of whom were over 50. This represents 14.3% of the increase in the number of women involved in paid work. Thus, the lack of increase the demand was due to the fact that these women were providing it.

Second, even though women's paid work was less affected than men's at the beginning of the crisis, their unemployment rate has continued to increase (to 20% by 2010 and 25% in 2012). Likewise, even though women's labor force participation increased, their unemployment rate also did in greater proportion. That is, a significant proportion of women entered the labor market as "unemployed." Additionally, the employment rate of mothers, of children under sixteen, decreased or stagnated in the same period (UNECE 2013). Thus, the typical "added worker effect" by which women enter the labor market to replace men’s job loss in previous crisis (Humphrey 1940; Galvez-Muñoz 2012; Humphries, 2013) did happen but a proportion of the added women became unemployed (see Fig 3), thus stagnating the demand for formal care.

Finally, the dramatic increase in men's and women's unemployment without a clear expectation of finding a new job has left families with more time to care but with less money to pay for services outside the family. In addition, austerity measures have cut regular benefits and subsidies for care services (fewer dining scholarships or less aid for accessing day centers or nursing homes), thus making them more expensive and putting downward pressure on the demand for care.

**Figure 3: Employment and Unemployment Rate by Sex, 2005 - 2012.**



Source: INE, *Encuesta de Población Activa.*

**3. Care policy, the economic crisis** and gender equality

This section deals with the ways in which new legislation on gender equality and reconciliation policies was introduced since the 1990's, as mentioned in the Introduction. It also highlights the contradictions between the laws' explicit objectives and the measures taken for their implementation, the difficulties encountered during the first years of implementation and as a result of the economic crisis.

The first time that the issue of balancing family and labor market work was approached specifically at the legal level in Spain was during the debates around the 1999 Law of Reconciliation.[[9]](#footnote-9) The law was an effort to regulate different forms of parental and care leaves, with the objective of facilitating women's incorporation in the labor force and of following EU directives (Astelarra 2005; Benería and Martínez 2010). For example, it extended the reduction in hours of work to facilitate not only the care of biological and adopted children but also the care (and attending to the death) of kin family members. Similarly, the law regulated reductions in social security payments for the employing institution granting these permissions to both men and women. This initial effort was expanded in 2007 with a new law --"Ley Orgánica de la Igualdad"-- also a transposition of a European Union Directive, focusing more specifically on gender equality and on the importance of reconciliation policies to achieve it. The law reinstated and expanded the principles and rights provided in the initial 1999 legislation regarding work leaves for women and men. For example, it solidified the granting of non-discriminatory maternity and paternity leaves as well as the need to protect pregnant and nursing women against risk. Some of the most important measures had to do with the introduction of independent and nontransferable paternity leave for fathers and the recognition of reconciliation rights for gay couples -measures that were not part of the 1999 law.

The objective behind this type of legislation was twofold. In addition to facilitating women’s incorporation in the paid labor force, as mentioned above, it was an explicit effort to promote equality of treatment between men and women workers. Its aim was to end discriminatory practices that had hurt women as the primary care-providers. However, as we argue below, its intent to legislate parental permits on equal bases between men and women was not quite implemented. The legislation also responded to the calls for promoting gender equality, not only from women in general and women’s groups in particular (Threlfall and Cousins and Valiente 2005) but also from a variety of international institutions. For example, it mentioned specifically the recommendations from the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action agreed upon at the Fourth UN Conference on Women; and it referred to the directives given by the Council of Europe and the recommendations from UNICEF and other international organizations regarding the need to grant parental leaves.[[10]](#footnote-10) In many ways, this was de Socialist Government's effort to place Spain at the level of international standards.

During the 2000s, this legislation was translated into specific norms, recommendations and guidelines -- some of them with European funds and also through Spanish-based initiatives taken at the national level, such as tax breaks and subsidies for working mothers, or at the regional level, as with the expansion of reconciliation rights and financial help for public employees to help balance family and market work. Along these lines, the Spanish state became a quasi-federal system organized around Autonomous Communities which have legislative power in crucial areas such as health and education as well as in terms of political legislation affecting gender equality and reconciliation policies. Hence, although there are laws that apply to the whole country, for example those related to labor rights of wage workers, the different Autonomous Communities have had the capacity to adopt their own legislation regarding reconciliation issues for public employees; they also have their own regional institutions, policies and action plans affecting gender equality.

During the two years that followed the approval of the Ley Orgánica de Igualdad (2007-2008), there was a considerable increase in the number of people that took paid maternity and paternity leaves (see Fig.4). Paternity leaves increased by 61% during the period and maternity leaves by 8%, reaching the highest level of the decade. At the same time, and despite these changes, an intense debate developed among academic and feminist circles about the limitations of the approved laws. It was argued that, even though they intended to foster co-responsability between men and women regarding care, the measures to ensure implementation were insufficient (Perelló 2009; Torns and Borràs and Carrasquer 2004; Tobío 2005). The explicit intent was to foster co-responsibility in caring among men and women but no concrete measures were included to press men to take co-responsibility seriously; while women's maternity leave could last 16 weeks, men's paternity leave was legislated at a maximum of 15 days. And by the end of the 2000's, women were still over-represented among those who had unpaid care leaves.[[11]](#footnote-11) In this sense, the Spanish experience de facto was more an effort to redistribute caring time between men and women than a process of de-familization in the sense suggested by Leitner and Lessenich (2007) of shifting care work from the family to the public sphere. Although there were some plans on the part of the Socialist government to build day care centers for children under 3 -a measure that would have contributed to de-familization-- the conservative government eliminated the plans in 2012.

Thus, the political responses to the economic crisis have affected reconciliation rights in contradictory ways. Such is the case with the successive labor reforms introduced since the crisis began. The first reform was adopted by the Socialist Party in 2010 and, although it did not eliminate care leaves or other reconciliation measures, it generated fear among workers of applying for any right because it made firing easier and cheaper. At the same time, some rights were paradoxically expanded after the 2011 reform, namely, those resulting from more flexible schedules and in cases of paid work leaves for children with serious illness, as cancer, or in intensive care. The second labor reform was adopted by the newly elected conservative government in January 2012. This was much more aggressive with labor rights and it affected reconciliation rights directly, unlike the indirect effects of the first reform. For example, it limited the capacity of workers to negotiate working schedules and length of their leaves while giving power to employers to impose these schedules as well as determining functional and regional mobility.

The labor law reforms have brought about some legal contradictions with the earlier, pre-crisis legislation. The pre-crisis laws had been used to protect workers from firing threats when using their reconciliation rights but the two labor reforms, as mentioned, have made the firing of workers much easier. However, in cases of legal conflicts, workers have had their rights recognized and sentences have been favorable to them. The following two quotes illustrate this point:[[12]](#footnote-12)

*Reconciliation rights have been confronted by subsequent laws such as the labor reforms. However, the legislation that introduced these rights has represented an important step forward in cases of conflict such as with women fired for being pregnant, reduction of the working day and breast feeding permits; in most cases, court cases have been favorable to the affected worker* (Trade Union representative, UGT's Women's Bureau)

*Gender equality legislation has provided a basic legal framework to win cases dealing with reconciliation conflicts* (Trade union Representative, CCOO's Women's Bureau)

In any case, the overall result of the crisis has been to lower the number of people benefitting from paid care rights, As Figure 4 shows; the number of both maternity and paternity leaves has decreased since 2008:

**Figure 4. Number of Workers Taking Paid Maternity and Paternity Leaves, 2004-2012\***



\* Note that paternity leaves were not adopted until 2007

Source: Seguridad Social, 2012.

The third most important law related to care was the Dependency Law passed in 2006. Unlike the laws that have been introduced before, the Dependency Law was a national initiative unrelated to the European Union mandatory legal framework. It was adopted with the objective of dealing with the new care problems brought by the important increase in life expectancy and thus in the number of elderly people, as mentioned earlier (see Figure 2). The Law recognized for the first time in Spain the right to being cared for by the state as a social right. It was meant to expand formal care services outside the home (elderly day care) and inside (call services or homecare) for dependent and disabled family members. Its adoption and implementation raised many expectations given the high demand for formal care on the part of many families (IMSERSO 2005).

Feminists had often pointed out the absence of a real debate on an explicit gender-related contract about dependent care; they were also concerned about the insufficient funding for formal care since they feared that this would reproduce the traditional model of family care that the Law intended to replace (Pérez Orozco and Baeza Gómez 2006; Cano-Martín and Ruiz-Seisdedos 2010). In fact, they were correct since the Law has resulted not so much in the growth of formal care in public or private institutions but mostly in the provision of funding and access to social security for a family member, normally women, who care for the dependent person at home. Thus, this subsidy for caring that the Law set up as "exceptional" became the rule rather than the exception. In this sense, the main objective of the law --the universal access to professional and formal care services that would have resulted in a higher degree of de-familization-- was not being implemented even before the crisis began. In addition, other problems had to be overcome, even during the first years of its implementation, such as insufficient funding and the distribution of expenses among the state and the different autonomous communities. As we argue below, the economic crisis has clearly reinforced this problem.

To sum, the "Dependency Law" had contradictory effects regarding care work. While it helped to raise consciousness regarding the amount of (unequal) work carried out by women for their families, it was not successful in redistributing elder care work between men and women and between home, market and the state. In fact, by "professionalizing" home family care, it actually solidified the position of women as caregivers given that it granted them access to social benefits they didn't have before. In this sense, the provision of public funds did not contribute to defamilize care since it was carried out mainly by female family members, even if paid.

Since the crisis began, the implementation of the Law of Dependency has been facing new and substantial difficulties. There has been delays in the acceptance of new beneficiaries or in the transfer of funds even when approved; the amount received for caring for a family member has been lowered; budget cuts have reduced considerably the scope of the Law; non-professional family care givers have seen their access to social security cancelled. All these effects have a clear gender dimension given that the great majority of care givers are "non-professional" women. Thus, the crisis has been particularly harsh on women in this respect and gender equality has not been enhanced by the Law as expected.

During the decade previous to the crisis, other funds and services related to care were also approved but they have also been eliminated as a result of the crisis or for ideological pressures. For example, the “baby check, a 2,500€ subsidy for working mothers, was cut out in 2010. In addition, some of the most notorious negative impacts of the crisis have been the indirect effects generated by budget cuts in key sectors such as health and education. Given the high proportion of female employment in the two sectors, these cuts have contributed to the increase in women's unemployment, thus expanding their time available for care work and reproductive activities at home. The cuts have also eliminated or reduced public services such as free meals at school and free ambulance services, both increasing reproductive work and family responsibilities, again affecting women in particular. Additionally, the election of the conservative party in 2011 added an ideological twist to some of the austerity policies affecting care. For example, public discourse referring to the Law of Dependency has moved away from the initial position of the Socialist government that showed a minimum recognition of women's work in providing care; the new conservative government has put pressure on families to pay for private care or to be responsible for their own care responsibilities. Since the arrival of the conservative government to power, the political discourse has focused mainly on the financial viability of care services without taking into account the gender consequences of the budget cuts. As Mariano Rajoy, the current President, has put it, "the Dependency Law is not viable" (*Público*, 3/30/2012). Thus, the political will to implement the adopted laws has practically disappeared.

**4. Changes in the organization of care work**

We have argued that, despite the legislative efforts regarding care work since the 1990s, family care strategies in Spain still tend to be private and individual. Even though childcare enrolment among 0-2 year-olds rose from 3, 3% (1991) to 30, 7% (2012), only half of them are in public centers (Ministerio de Educacion, 2013). Hence most working mothers with children below 3 have to develop private strategies such as: care redistribution within the family, hiring help, or private daycare. The most common option, however, is to rely on close relatives- very often grandmothers or een grandfathers. Similarly, and despite the Law of Dependency, the care of dependent people continue to be provided either by family members of hired domestic workers. To illustrate, by 2009, 22.5% of households with one or more members over 65 were relying on paid domestic service (Household Budget Survey 2009). A high proportion (54%) of employees hired under the domestic service social security scheme were immigrant women (Spanish Social Security, Social Security Schemes 2012), who, during the 2000s, immigrated in large numbers. The majority were from Latin America, particularly from Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru (Benería 2008; Bujan 2011; Carrasco and Domínguez 2012) although also from other countries like Rumania.

Regarding the tendencies in the time dedicated to care work by men and women, Spain has only two Time Use Surveys --2002-03 and 2009-2010. They provide useful information even though the years are not the most appropriate to analyze the effects of the economic crisis. The surveys indicate that the distribution of care work between men and women has continued to be very unequal at the aggregate level. As Table 1 shows for the two time periods, the amount of women's time dedicated to care work has remained larger than that of men. This is so even though men have increased considerably the time spent on care work, especially childcare (Tables 1 and 2), reflecting changes in family norms and gender stereotypes as discussed in section 2.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**TABLE 1. Changes in time use: men and women, 2003-2010 (average hrs./min./day)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 2002-2003 | | 2009-2010 | |
|  | MEN | WOMEN | MEN | WOMEN |
| Personal Care | 11:24 | 11:21 | 11:36 | 11:26 |
| Paid Work | 03:37 | 01:44 | 03:04 | 01:54 |
| Schooling | 00:42 | 00:43 | 00:39 | 00:39 |
| Housework | 01:30 | 04:24 | 01:54 | 04:07 |
| *Cooking* | *00:22* | *01:38* | *00:26* | *01:25* |
| *Cleaning and other activities* | *00:13* | *00:56* | *00:17* | *00:49* |
| *Clothing* | *00:01* | *00:29* | *00:01* | *00:23* |
| *Gardening and animal care* | *00:15* | *00:07* | *00:18* | *00:07* |
| *Construction and repairs* | *00:06* | *00:01* | *00:06* | *00:01* |
| *Shopping and services* | *00:18* | *00:32* | *00:20* | *00:31* |
| *Domestic administration* | *00:01* | *00:00* | *00:01* | *00:01* |
| *Childcare* | *00:10* | *00:24* | *00:18* | *00:32* |
| *Eldercare* | *00:02* | *00:04* | *00:02* | *00:04* |
| Volunteer work | 00:11 | 00:16 | 00:12 | 00:16 |
| Social life and entertainment | 01:32 | 01:27 | 01:04 | 01:01 |
| Sports and outdoors activities | 00:56 | 00:39 | 00:52 | 00:37 |
| Hobbies and games | 00:27 | 00:12 | 00:44 | 00:24 |
| Mass Media | 02:25 | 02:08 | 02:43 | 02:30 |
| Travel and unspecified time use | 01:15 | 01:05 | 01:14 | 01:06 |

Source: *Encuesta de Empleo del tiempo* (2002-03 & 2009-10)

These figures reflect a convergence between men's and women's unpaid work. While women participation in housework activities has decreased, except for childcare, men have experienced the opposite trend (see Table 1). Men’s decrease in paid work of over 20 minutes has been parallel to an increase of over 30 minutes in unpaid domestic/reproductive work. It must be pointed out that this cannot be solely attributed to the crisis since the increase in unpaid work is present for both employed and unemployed men. However, the crisis is likely to have intensified the trend given the high male unemployment and the growth of atypical family models:unemployment men involved in childcare increased from 9, 6% in 2003 to 21, 9% in 2010 being the group with the highest increase. And the number of male breadwinner and dual income families has decreased while those whose male members are unemployed but women do either full or part time work have almost doubled (see Figure 1). That is, the crisis has contributed to the rise of family models in which the wife is the sole economic provider; this is the case for 9.5% of families whose members fall in the 25-49 age bracket, a clear rise from the 4% pre-crisis figure.

**Table 2. Men involved in Childcare and Housework by activity status, 2003-2010 (%)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Status** | **Childcare** | | **Housework[[14]](#footnote-14)** | |
|  | **2003** | **2010** | **2003** | **2010** |
| **In labor force** | 16,4 | 24,8 | 68,8 | 76,3 |
| **Employed** | 17 | 25,7 | 68,1 | 74,5 |
| **Unemployed** | 9,6 | 21,9 | 77,3 | 82,6 |
| **Inactive** | 2 | 2,1 | 72,1 | 71,8 |

Source: *Encuesta de Empleo del Tiempo* (2002-03/2009-10)

Scholars such as Berik and Kongar who have analyzed the tendency towards convergence between men and women's time spent in productive and reproductive work have argued that this tendency is accentuated during recessions due to changes in the employment status of both women and men. They also report that the tendency picks up again in the post-recession period (Berik and Kongar, 2011). In the case of Spain, it is difficult to know to what extent the changes resulting from high male unemployment will be permanent. However, the two time use surveys, one of which was done five years before the crisis erupted, lead us to believe that it is likely to continue. The surveys also show the small increment of informal help provided by the extended family, particularly by grandparents and unemployed family members. This was reiterated by interviews with employees dealing with care services:

*There has been an important return to the use of extended family help from the elderly to take care of grandchildren, even with more responsibility than before* (Social Services public employee responsible for childcare).

*The decrease in the number of children in daycare centers seems not so much due to the rise in prices as a combination of both higher prices and unemployment* (City Council Treasurer).

A different issue regarding the impact of the crisis is not only the increase in family inter-generational networks for the provision of childcare but also as a form of income sharing and as a family survival strategy. This is in fact a return to past practices among extended families but this time under crisis conditions; it has become quite commonplace for example to use grandparents' pension funds for the whole family, especially in low income households. Since the crisis exploded, the percentage of households in which all working age members are unemployed and living with someone over 65 has increased from 4,1% in 2004 to 7.8% 2010 (EUROSTAT-SILC 2012). The same can be said for the provision of care, as pointed out earlier. As underlined by the following quotes,

*The problem is not only the fact that many people become unemployed; many of them become dependent on grandpa's pension to survive.* (Civil Servant in charge of eldercare)

*Given that the fees for public day care have doubled [in Catalonia], the options imply either that caring be done again by women or by other family members* (Person responsible of an elder day care).

This increased family reliance on older people --not only in terms of income but also of working time-- is a matter of concern that has become a topic of public debate; it may also explain the growing visibility of older people in public demonstrations against austerity measures[[15]](#footnote-15).

**Concluding comments**

We have argued that the effects of the economic crisis in Spain have erased some of the initial measures provided by reconciliation policies, including their impact on the progress regarding gender equality achieved since the late 1990s. The different laws addressing the problems of reconciling family and labor market work --adopted since 1999-- were the result of a variety of factors that resulted from feminist demands and had been influenced by international and EU directives; they had facilitated an important increase in women's labor force participation, changes in gender norms, and pressures towards gender equality.

From the late 1990´s to the outburst of the crisis, debates about balancing family and labor market became an important part in the public agenda and in the academic literature. Laws related to care were intended to foster co-responsibility between men and women and a process of de-familization, through which the state would become the main provider of care services. However, the redistribution of childcare and eldercare between home, market and the state was not successful. In terms of childcare, the Spanish experience was based mostly on extending care leaves intended to redistribute caring time between men and women. Despite the improvements and extension of reconciliation rights, the adopted measures have maintained some differences between maternity and paternity permits, for example they have not totally eliminated women's overrepresentation in unpaid leaves. At the same time, the "Dependency Law," which "professionalized" home family elder care, did not contribute to defamilize care since the work was carried out mainly by female family members, even if with public aid. Further still, the economic crisis has become an excuse to justify austerity programs and negligent enforcement of the adopted policies, with negative effects on gender equality such as diminished protection and time for care leaves and elimination of some important eldercare public grants for family members.

We have shown that, since the beginning of the crisis, women's labor force participation has increased while men's has decreased or they have actually been withdrawing from the labor market. However, this has not resulted in an increase in the demand for formal care as it had before the crisis. This is due to various reasons, the main one being that the increase in labor force participation has taken place among women over 50 while the increase in unemployment has affected younger women who can dedicate time to care work. We have also shown that the crisis has lead to a redistribution of unpaid care within households.

The comparison between the two Time Use Surveys mentioned above shows that men´s decrease in paid work has been parallel to their increase in unpaid domestic/reproductive work. Women have experienced the opposite trend: their participation in paid work has increased while housework activities have decreased, except for childcare and eldercare. Hence, there has been a convergence between men's and women's unpaid work that cannot be solely attributed to the crisis, even though the crisis is likely to have intensified the previous trends. We can then say that the economic crisis period has represented some contradictory tendencies in terms of gender in/equality. Overall, however, it represents a retrogressive turn in the path towards the institutionalization of care and its redistribution within the family, the market and the state, resulting in a step backward in reconciling family and labor market work and in gender equality. In addition, the Spanish case shows that "politics matter" since the more conservative government in place since 2011 has intensified the negative trends.

From a different perspective, it can be argued that many of the gender-related effects of the crisis can be compared to those that were registered during the "debt crisis" in Latin America and in other developing countries during the 1980s and 1990s, although with similarities and differences[[16]](#footnote-16). It is interesting to note that the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) of that period in Latin America were instrumental to point out that macro-economic policies were/are not neutral with respect to gender. Since then, feminist economists in particular have become very involved in the analysis of these connections and they have been contributing to our understanding of the effects of the current crisis globally (Ezquerra 2012; Fukuda-Parr et al, eds., 2013; Antonopoulos, ed., 2013). In this sense, our paper analyzes links between the macro aspects of the crisis and its consequences at the meso and micro levels, particularly for understanding crisis-related gender differences in the labor market and for the care economy*.*

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1. This paper is belongs to a series of five working papers that focus on work-family balance and gender equality in Spain, the Netherlands, South Korea, Turkey and Mexico. These papers emerged from country case studies originally undertaken in 2009-2010 under the auspices of a research program by Women for Women’s Human Rights – New Ways, an autonomous women’s NGO in Istanbul Turkey in collaboration with Istanbul Technical University Women’s Studies Center. The country case studies also included France and Sweden (see [www.wwhr.org](http://www.wwhr.org)). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Lourdes Benería is Professor Emerita, Cornell University. Maria Martinez-Iglesias is a PhD candidate, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Spain. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Women’s labor force participation rate was as low as 8.3% in 1940; it increased to 19.1% in 1971 (Benería 1977). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This difference was probably due, at least partially, to their marital status but there is no public data available to prove it on the Spanish Labor Force Participation Survey. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gay marriage in Spain was legalized in 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. To illustrate, in 2004, most elderly caregivers were married women with a mean age of 53, with primary education and no paid work; they were either housewives or retired, with barely any formal social security and mostly socialized on pre-democratic values regarding their position as women (Libro Blanco de la Dependencia, 2004; Durán, 2006.) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The average European Community's rate (27 countries) for the same year was 1.57. The slight increase in the fertility rate is due to the higher rate among immigrant women. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Referring to the number of divorces per 1,000 inhabitants. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Although some rights for working women did exist before, --such as maternity leaves-- they were not viewed from the perspective of balancing family and labor market work (reconciliation) or in terms of gender equality. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A related piece of legislation focusing on gender equality was the 2004 “Comprehensive Law on Violence Against Women” (*Ley Integral Contra la Violencia de Género*), which was approved under the Socialist party government as a response to the historical demands from the women’s movement. This law included not only measures related to legal action in case of gender-related violence but also a wholistic approach to help women and children suffering from violence. Although not directly linked to reconciliation policies, it was very important in the continuous struggle towards gender equality because it clearly recognized serious obstacles to enhancing women's status and autonomy, including the problems associated with violence against them. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In 2009, women represented 95. 9% among those who took unpaid childcare leave and the 85.82 of those who took unpaid eldercare leave (Instituto de la Mujer, 2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The quotes included in this paper come from the in-depth interviews carried out by one of the authors for a different but related project [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See also Delgado 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Under the Spanish Time Use Survey, housework is defined as "all activities, tasks or work performed by the informant for his/ her own home and at also for other households" [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. An example is provided by the group "Yayoflautas" in Barcelona and other similar groups in different regions protesting not only against budget cuts but also against fraudulent financial products. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Similarities can be traced regarding the effects of unemployment and budget cuts leading to the intensification of women's work. However, in the case of Spain we have also observed a tendency for men and women's work to converge. Also, given the higher development of the welfare state in the European context, social protection, even if being erased, has been in place to an extent that was not in Latin America. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)