



**FAMILY**PLATFORM

## Realities of Mothers in Europe



A report by World Movement of Mothers Europe (MMMEurope).

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- 6) Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon
- 7) Department of Sociology and Social research, University of Milan-Bicocca
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- 9) London School of Economics
- 10) Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), Brussels
- 11) Forum Delle Associazioni Familiari, Italy
- 12) MMMEurope (Mouvement Mondial des Mères-Europe), Brussels

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## Introduction

Like today's European Union, the World Movement of Mothers has its roots in the devastation of World War II. Mothers gathered in Paris to pledge their support and efforts to the construction of a peaceful Europe. Their organisation developed to the point that the movement under its original name in French, *Mouvement Mondial des Mères*, became one of the earliest civil society organisations to be accredited by the United Nations. Mothers saw themselves as leaders, educators, and peacemakers not only in the elemental basic unit of society, the family, but also in their neighbourhoods and in the wider community. In the eyes of the founding mothers, peaceful societies had to be built from the base upward, the process being energised by the civilising and organising energy of the world's mothers.

The archives of the World Movement of Mothers, commonly referred to by its French acronym, MMM, contain a remarkable trove of materials witness to the vision and energy with which these mothers have been engaged in the cause of peace building. They were also prodigious networkers, issuing newsletters and questionnaires to their ever expanding membership, and reporting their findings at international conferences<sup>1</sup>.

From the earliest days of the Movement, the Mothers gave their time freely, working as unremunerated volunteers. To this day, unpaid volunteer service is the rule of the organisation. Its vast membership and its active leaders give of themselves for the purposes of strengthening mothers in their family role and promoting the wellbeing and social sustainability of human society.

In 2003 the World Movement of Mothers created a permanent delegation to the European Union in Brussels. This EU delegation has become MMMEurope, a partner in the European Commission's Seventh Framework FAMILYPLATFORM project. Among its assignment is the charge to report on the situation of mothers in Europe and critically review research on families from their point of view. MMMEurope's contribution is to ensure that the experiential knowledge of Europe's mothers would be reflected in the output of FAMILYPLATFORM.

In order to consult with mothers across Europe, we began with expert interviews and followed up by focus group discussions with mothers of different cultural and economic backgrounds. We then launched an online survey of mothers in Europe to learn their concerns, priorities and recommendations. As of the time of writing, over 11,000 mothers from across Europe, who can

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<sup>1</sup> MMM's European and international surveys include the following: in 1982 MMM surveyed two thousand mothers on the interchangeability and specificity of parental roles. The results became the basis of a study day at the Palais de Luxembourg in Paris where delegates came from the United Nations, UNESCO ministries of European states and NGOs. By 1989 the critical policy question was "*Who is minding the education and development of children?*" Again the Mothers held an extended dialogue among their membership resulting in a research report and conference. In 1993, following a UNESCO conference on street children, MMM launched a survey of two thousand parents, adolescents, and children to explore the meaning of parental "*presence*" and "*representation*" in the life of their children. The results were shared with policy makers and civil society representations. The year 1997 marked the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Movement of Mothers. MMM celebrated by presenting the results of a survey on the role of mothers in family health at a World Health Organization conference. In 1999, MMM presented the results of its survey on unpaid work in the home at a UNESCO conference.

be described as active, politically-concerned and educated, have entered into dialogue with us. Their voices have provided a standard for critically evaluating the scientific and policy literature we have reviewed.

The reviewed literature includes well-known studies on family related topics funded by the European Commission, the OECD, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. Other bibliographical sources include the UNICEF-*Innocenti* reports on the wellbeing of children, and the United Nations Institute for Social Development Reports on Unpaid Care Work.

For the issues which seemed most important to mothers we went beyond these reports and consulted other research disciplines for greater understanding of underlying processes.

A major finding of our critical review of government and academic literature is this: **rarely are mothers recognised as specific and distinct participants with a special function and identity. Even more rarely are they given the opportunity to speak with their own voice on policy matters that directly affect them.**

Our consultation has extended to mothers in Europe the opportunity to speak as mothers and be heard across Europe. Thousands have responded. Their voices echo throughout our report. The richness of their messages invites deep reflection. We call upon policy makers at all levels to open channels for regular dialogue, to listen, and to pay attention to what Europe's mothers have to say.

# Statistical Snapshot of the Mothers of Europe

## The Mothers of Europe

Who are the mothers of Europe? Where do they live? What do we know about their lives? What is important to them? With these initial questions we began our investigation by querying official EU sources.

If one defines a mother as a woman who has given birth to or adopted and reared one or more children, there are surprisingly few statistics that would indicate how many mothers there actually are and where they live in Europe. Here are the estimations we received from official sources:

### ***Eurostat:***

Helpful researchers at Eurostat estimated an EU25 total of 87 million mothers, age 15 or older, with children living in the same household<sup>2</sup>.

Seventy-one percent of these estimated total mothers reside in six countries: Italy (11.9 million), Germany (11.8 million), Spain (9.9 million), France (9.9 million), UK (9.8 million) and Poland (8.5 million).

The number of mothers whose children have grown up or no longer lived with them for whatever reason cannot be estimated from Eurostat data.

### ***Eurofound:***

Researchers at Eurofound interviewed a sample of approximately 20,200 adult women during 2007 for the European Quality of Life Survey published in 2009. The sample consisted of 500 or more women in each EU country. One question asked of each woman was “How many children of your own do you have?” Seventy-six percent of women reported having one or more children of their own.

To help construct a profile of mothers in Europe, Eurofound provided unweighted response counts for pertinent interview questions. These data do not tell us how many mothers there are in Europe, but they provide the basis for a first estimate of the proportion of women who are mothers and the number of children they have. Other questions were asked of the women interviewed. While responses to these questions do not necessarily apply to those who are mothers, they do provide a suggestive initial estimation of a statistical profile<sup>3&4</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> Sweden and Denmark provided no data on which estimates could be made. A ‘mother’ for the Eurostat estimate is an adult woman aged 15 or older in a household including children. No other criterion for identifying a mother is available in Eurostat household surveys.

<sup>3</sup> The Eurofound data are unweighted responses aggregated across the total sample of women interviewed. At the time of this writing, percentages were available only for the total sample, but Eurofound has offered

- Proportion of mothers in Eurofound sample (interviewed Women who have children of their own)
  - 76%
- Proportion of mothers by number of children
  - 19% have one child, 34% have 2 children, 14% have 3 children, 5% have 4 children, and 4% have 5 children or more.
  - Average number of children per mother in the sample is 1.54<sup>5</sup>.
- Age of women interviewed
  - 12% are aged between 18-24, 18% are between 25-34, 27% are between 35-49, 22% are between 50-64 and 22% are 65 or over.
  - Median age of the sample is 51.00 years, mean age is 52.31 years.
- Couple relations of women interviewed
  - 64% are married or living with partner, 7% are separated or divorced, 13% are widowed, 16% never married and do not live with partner.
- Employment of women interviewed
  - 38% work as employee, or employer/self-employed, 2% employed but on leave for child-care or other cause, 24% are retired, 20% are full time homemaker, 6% are in school, 5% are unemployed, 2% are unable to work due to long-term illness.
- Highest education completed of women interviewed
  - 19% primary school, 21% lower secondary, 35% higher secondary, 7% post secondary, 17% first tertiary degree, 1% advanced tertiary degree.
- Voluntary service activity of women interviewed
  - 10% of interviewed mothers performed voluntary work weekly, 24% occasionally or more often.
- Migration background of women interviewed
  - 6% report at least one parent born in another EU country.
  - 5% report at least one parent born in a non-EU country.

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to help MMME with further analysis of the data collected for the purpose of producing an improved statistical profile of mothers in Europe.

<sup>4</sup> For comparison with the MMM Europe's "European Survey of Mothers" sample, see p46 of this report.

<sup>5</sup> This estimate is somewhat low because all responses "over 5" were counted as "5".



## Chapter 1 – The Transition to Motherhood

As part of her female biology, a woman is reminded regularly of the birth-giving possibility of her body; thus every woman *“needs to take some kind of stance on this question”* (Sevón, 2005: 464). Some women take a decision early in life to remain childless, thinking perhaps of the necessity of “constant engagement” with the child and having a different priority in life<sup>6</sup>. Others *“drift into childlessness through a series of contingent decisions”* (REPRO, 2009: 49), usually involving postponement of child-bearing.

A woman's decision to postpone childbearing can involve factors of completing an education, finding a job, and establishing a stable couple relationship (Billari, 2006). If she has not completed her educational preparation, she might think that the course of study may not combine well with maternity, or the opportunity to study, if interrupted, may never be regained, because some educational programmes are not as easily accessible to older women. In a society where economic independence is increasingly required of a woman, the price of pregnancy before completing an education and obtaining employment may present too much risk to some<sup>7</sup>.

A woman in Europe is usually able to choose the time of pregnancy and does so with her partner; but if the decision is not reflected on beforehand she will face it after conception. She will then meditate on the value of the life of the child forming within her and the changes that will come into her life. If the couple relationship is put under pressure by the coming child, especially if the conception was not a joint decision, a lack of commitment on the part of the father may cause him to rupture the relationship and abandon the responsibility. In such a case or if her other prerequisites have not been fulfilled, she may decide to terminate the pregnancy<sup>8</sup>.

But if she chooses to carry the baby to term, it is because, on balance, the baby is wanted<sup>9</sup>. *“The choice to become a mother in a context of personal difficulty is an affirmation of strength, determination, and desire to offer care for another. In the end, establishing the primordial bonds of love and connection is the ultimate goal of their mothering... [along with] a sense of purpose, validation, and order”* (Edin & Kefalas, 2005: 185). In the extreme case of abandonment by her companion, to carry the pregnancy to term is seen by some as *“an act of valour”* (Edin & Kefalas 2005: 142; Lardellier, 2009: 54). Such an act of valour is enabled by government support for children and single mothers, and by a more accepting societal attitude.

In the EU27 countries, the majority of babies are born to parents who are in a committed couple relationship (Eurofound EQLS II, 2010: fig 2, p14). Most women (and men) realise that

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<sup>6</sup> According to Lohmann et al. 2009, p30: "Of women between 15-39 years in EU-27 countries, on average 9.6% expressed the desire to have no children, with the highest percentage of 20% of women in Finland being thus inclined."

<sup>7</sup> See Chapter 5 for a discussion of the consequences of postponing childbearing.

<sup>8</sup> In EU-27 countries in 2008, 1,207,646 women chose this alternative, according to IPFE statistics.

<sup>9</sup> In EU-27 countries in 2008, 5,427,099 babies were born. In 2009 births declined by 74,000. Eurostat: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00111>.

parenthood will entail self-sacrifice, and so they choose the time after making preparation. Because child-bearing will often have a cost in terms of wages foregone and employment set aside if only temporarily, there may be feelings of ambivalence connected with maternity (Sevón, 2005). Motherhood is undertaken because the mother feels that, along with the sacrifice, she will be rewarded with happiness in raising her child (Billari, 2008)<sup>10</sup>.

In the online survey of 2010 by the Mouvement Mondial des Mères (MMEurope), mothers in Europe were asked, *“If you were talking to a woman who is pregnant with her first child, how would you describe what it is like to transition into being a mother?”* See how some of the mothers’ respond in their own voice (Survey of Mothers in Europe, 2010):

- ✓ *“It is the achievement of an enormous project! It calls for great responsibility, and for commitment and for giving of oneself. But it brings with it great happiness.”*
- ✓ *“Before I was just ME; now I am US.”*
- ✓ *“A total change of life. One no longer lives for oneself, but one is obliged to think first of one’s children. With one’s partner/husband one is no longer a couple but a family.”*
- ✓ *“It is a big change going from 2 to 3. Baby becomes the focus. It is important for the parents to be united as a couple and to attend to each other.”*
- ✓ *“A Big shock, everything changes, intense and impossible to describe in words...when things are in place, the love shared outweighs all the sacrifices that are a must. No other experience is like it in the world and no greater accomplishment, degree or career can outweigh that love.”*
- ✓ *“You think that you can love, but when you have your first child the love that you feel is like nothing else on this earth. It will make you become a lioness and want to protect your children from all harm and badness. You will love your children forever and nothing can break that bond. Spending time with your children, telling them how much you love them is far more important than any material thing that you can buy for them. They probably won’t remember most of the toys and gadgets that they get, but they will remember the walk on the beach and the picnics they had with you, the baking of the cake and the special times!!! ”*
- ✓ *“The passage from woman to mother is an exceptional event that only we women can fully live. The relationship between mother and child is wonderful, moving. It is the most beautiful gift of life, and it is a privilege that we have and that none can take from us.”*
- ✓ *“It is the most beautiful gift that life can give to a woman. Motherhood produces a personal blossoming that motivates us toward giving and generosity. To be a mother is to give of oneself. It is an act of love immeasurable and unbounded by time. It is also an enormous challenge that drives us to humility in failure, that pushes us to surpass one’s inner (personal) and outer (physical) limits.”*

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<sup>10</sup> See also Angeles, 2009. The latter reports research by Dr. Luis Angeles of the University of Glasgow leading him to claim that having children improves married peoples’ life satisfaction, and that the more children they have the happier they are. Conversely, for ‘unpartnered’ parents raising children takes a toll on parents’ reported satisfaction with social life, and amount and use of leisure time. More recently Eurofound in its EQLS II 2010 report provides similar findings in its pan-European survey. See p55-56.

**The overwhelming messages from mothers responding to this question are:**

1. The birth of the first child constitutes a major and irreversible change in focus, priorities, and life-course. One never again sees life as one did before becoming a mother.
2. The responsibility of motherhood is supremely challenging, highly demanding, and worth everything it costs.
3. Because of this change, mothers develop a distinct perspective and should be allowed to speak for themselves.
4. Non-mothers should not presume to speak for mothers.

## Chapter 2 – Mother's Concerns for the Child

*“Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”,*  
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 (3).

*“The right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions shall be respected, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of such freedom and right”,*  
Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 14 (3).

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In giving birth to a baby, along with her love a mother has a vision of potential in her child. In raising the next generation, she has one eye to the future, attempting to evaluate the effect of any current action or condition on the child. A mother understands that she must look at the child's present behaviour and ask *“where will this behaviour lead?”* She attempts to foresee the outcome of attitudes and comportment. She feels a responsibility to teach and train the child according to personal and societal values within the national framework in which they live. As cited above, to act on this sense of personal responsibility is recognised as a basic human right, along with that of the father, in the highest statements of principles governing European society.

Viewed in the context of social sustainability, the exercise of parental responsibility and rights is at the core of the process by which people of one generation produce and prepare the people of the succeeding generation. In this context economic goods that are bought and sold become *“inputs into the development of human capabilities”*. **On an aggregate scale this process of societal reproduction centred in the family constitutes an intergenerational investment of time, energy, and resources that subsumes and far exceeds the size and scope of the market economy measured by GDP<sup>11</sup>.**

Mothers are pivotal decision makers and key actors in this intergenerational total human economy. Their intense attention, instruction, and caring is not seen by them as a cost, but rather the investment of themselves in the lives of their children. Neither is it a simple lifestyle choice like keeping a pet for company. **Mothers see themselves at the centre of life's essential enterprise, that of producing and preparing people who will sustain the future.**

### Concerns for the Infant

Following birth, a period of maternal recuperation is provided by maternity leave in European countries which permits the infant to be cared for by the mother and, if paternity leave is taken, by the father as well. This time with the infant also permits the mother to breastfeed if she desires, and many mothers value this opportunity, which according to the World Health

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<sup>11</sup> The citation is from Nancy Folbre, economist, and member of the 2009 Stiglitz Commission, whose report is cited elsewhere. See Folbre, Nancy. *Valuing Children : Rethinking the Economics of the Family*, Harvard University Press 2008, page 11. For a fuller treatment of the topic the reader is directed to her works listed in the Bibliography.

Organization, has important health benefits for both the baby and the mother. Breastfeeding is also recognised as advantageous in fostering the emotional attachment and bonding between the baby and the mother. Recent research shows that this attachment, and the mother's attention and interaction support the neurological development of the baby, establishing healthy circuits in the brain and chemical balances that determine the infant's future capabilities and how she or he will act upon and respond to the world (UNICEF *Innocenti* Report Card, 2008: 6).

Numerous studies in developmental psychology have demonstrated the importance of a good development of the triadic relationship of the mother, father, and infant in the early months of life. Important functions of the father are to sustain and care for the mother and to provide security. In addition, both parents build vital bonds with the child, which are basic in the child's formation of the sense of identity, self-confidence and self-esteem (Bouregba, 2007).

Maternal and paternal leave systems facilitate these processes and last for varying lengths of time, for part of the first year and in some countries up to three years (See MOCHO, 2004: Chapter II for discussion of leaves and benefits; also UNICEF *Innocenti*, 2008-01). While there are several objectives in designing leave systems, this discussion will focus on concerns for the child.

One study cited by Chapple & Richardson associates higher cognitive development six years or more later with children who had been breastfed, which calls for co-ordinating maternity leave with the time of breastfeeding. Otherwise they do not find support for a relationship between parental leave and child wellbeing (Chapple & Richardson, 2009: 110-111).

In contrast, the recommendation of several recent studies is to design leaves to permit parents to care for their children themselves during the first year at least (UNICEF *Innocenti* Report Card, 2008: 13; see also Penn, 2009: para. 12, p8; and "The State of the World's Mothers 2009: Investing in the Early Years").

During its first year, more than anything else, the infant needs to be cherished. The care needs to be immediately attentive, warmly responsive, and consistent as the foundation of basic trust is laid, and as the baby's brain develops according to the interaction and nurturing received (for a cogent up-to-date discussion see Dr Martina Leibovici, "Why Mothering Matters", 2010). Evidence of the long-term impact of a mother's investment during the first year of her child's life comes from a 34-year longitudinal study reported on July 26, 2010 (see Maselko, *et al.*, 2010). High levels of maternal affection at eight months were associated with significantly lower levels of distress measured 34 years later in adult offspring. In their conclusion, the authors state what mothers know from their own life experience: "*early nurturing and warmth have long-lasting positive effects on mental health well into adulthood*".

It is therefore of vital importance for the sustainability of European society that policy makers acknowledge, value, encourage, and sustain the willing investment in their children by mothers, fathers, and other primary caregivers.

## **Concerns for the Child of Pre-School Age**

At the conclusion of maternity leave, a mother will consider the options for her continuing involvement in the labour force (to be discussed in Chapter 3) and for the childcare that will enable her employment. Possibilities for non-maternal childcare include group care in public and private institutions, informal arrangements with extended family or friends, and in-home personnel.

Increasing the number of pre-school child care centres was part of the Barcelona targets: *"Confirming the goal of full employment, the European Council agreed that Member States should remove disincentives to female participation in the labour market and strive to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90 % of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33 % of children under 3 years of age"* (Plantenga, 2009).

The fact is that most parents are wondering at what time a toddler may be placed in centre-based care with good effect. We will focus here again on the concerns for the child: when does a small child benefit from attendance at pre-school? Because more small children are entering some form of non-maternal childcare in their early years, these questions have become important for the future of European societies and are the subject of studies.

There is potential good in attendance at a high quality pre-school, especially when a child comes from a disadvantaged home of persistent poverty, substance abuse, mental illness, maternal depression, or low parental education. In addition, when parents do not speak the local language the centre-based care will improve the child's language and cognitive ability, enhancing also later scholastic ability (UNICEF *Innocenti*, 2008). When early childcare in a program of high quality is combined with other family services it has additional positive effects, including facilitating maternal employment, which yields higher income in the home, which may benefit the child (Chapple & Richardson, 2009: 114). In overcoming the effects of poverty-stricken homes, pre-school attendance can be effective in combination with other efforts, but cannot be expected by itself to create miracles (Penn, 2009; UNICEF *Innocenti*, 2008-01)<sup>12</sup>.

In their 2009 OECD report *"Doing Better for Children"*, Chapple & Richardson pose this important question: *"If a work-based anti-poverty strategy is part of the package for reducing child poverty, a further question arises: what are the implications of getting parents into work for other, broader dimensions of child wellbeing?"* (Chapple & Richardson, 2009: 172).

The economic dimension of family life, while essential, may not be as influential on the life of the child as the closeness or connection that the child feels to the parents.

### **The Vital Connection**

Non-maternal childcare has been associated with decreased parental sensitivity to the child. Obviously there is less time spent with the child, but it may also be linked to a disinvestment on the part of the parent (UNICEF *Innocenti*, 2008-01: 12; Jacob, 2007: 12; Eberstadt, 2004: 19).

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<sup>12</sup> Of note is the Harlem project, a continuing effort in New York City, which directs attention to improving pre-schools, primary and secondary schools, parenting skills, and neighbourhoods at the same time. (NYTimes "The Harlem Project" 20 June 2004).

The child's attachment to parents and engaged adults may be replaced by the child's attachment to peers in his or her age group when group care is used. In a group setting it is difficult for a non-relative to meet an individual child's attachment and orienting needs fully, especially if several other infants and toddlers are vying for that caregiver's attention. The difficulty increases when the adult in the caregiver role is also in rotation. Children in such situations may perceive adults as inaccessible and undependable, and may have little option but to form attachment relationships with one another. Over time peer attachment can grow to compete with or replace attachment to parents, with serious consequences for later receptivity to being taught by or to taking cues from adults (Neufeld, 2006: 7). If very young, the child may be asked to form relationships with others before he is emotionally mature enough to handle them (Chapple & Richardson, 2009).

Furthermore, an increase in aggressive and disruptive behaviour has been linked to a child's attendance in centre-based care at an early age and long hours therein (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, cited in UNICEF *Innocenti*, 2008-01: 12).

In a group care school setting, the child receives less adult attention than at home, and from teachers who relate differently to their students than parents relate to their own children. Additionally, the child relates to the teacher differently as well (Penn, 2009). In sum, if the early childcare is not of high quality then there is risk that it may supplant what the family is attempting to do, or it may do more harm than good (UNICEF *Innocenti*, 2008-01; Penn, 2009).

Belsky states that *"Whatever the effects of early childcare experience discerned...family factors and processes proved more predictive of children's wellbeing than any feature of childcare. So it appears that what matters to a child most is the kind of family he comes from...whether the family is economically viable, parents are partnered, mother is not depressed, and her parenting is itself sensitive to the needs of the child"* (See Belsky report given at the Conference of European Ministers of Family Affairs, Prague, February, 2009: 6; Jacob, 2007; UNICEF *Innocenti*, 2008, Report Card 8: 12).

Because of the diversity of circumstances and the controversial nature of the question, the appropriate age for any particular child to enter pre-school is best left to the discretion of the parents who are in a better position to decide what is best for their child in the framework of their family needs and desires; the role of the state should be that of providing options from which parents may choose<sup>13</sup>.

Respondents to the *Survey of Mothers in Europe* expressed a strong preference for full-time maternal care when the child is under the age of three. Although younger mothers show more preference to work part-time, very few mothers preferred to work full-time while the child is under the age of three (see also Chapter 3, Figures 3.2 and 3.3, and Annex I, Graph 9). Only 23% of mothers agreed with the statement that remunerated employment is more satisfying than the upbringing of children. Ninety-four per cent of mothers answered that it was either *"very important"* or *"important"* to have a choice of whether to care for the child herself or to have public childcare of high quality.

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<sup>13</sup> "For example, all family organizations and political parties are today demanding free choice of childcare. Public policies must not dictate a particular form of childcare, especially one outside the home and community." Gilles Séraphin *"The sources of family policy"*, UNAF, 2010.

A mother's voice:

- ✓ *"Give us the choice to take care of our own children up to the time they start school, and make it possible financially. All of society would benefit."*

There are, of course, many other forms of non-maternal care through extended family members including grandparents, other family members and in-home personnel including nannies and *au pairs*. Such arrangements may offer advantages of less interruption of the child's biological rhythm, less exposure to sources of infection, and a more constant relationship with adult caregivers, and more coherence in care-giving approach.

About 58% of mothers responding to the 2010 MMMEurope's survey receive help from parents and other extended family to occasionally provide childcare, and 34% of surveyed mothers use in-home services such as a nanny or cleaning lady<sup>14</sup>.

## Concerns for Children of Obligatory School-Age

In this section we treat the issues of concern to mothers of children in primary and secondary school.

In OECD countries including many European countries, on average 75% of 11, 13, and 15 year-olds live with both parents, rising to 85% in Southern European countries. Single parent families account for about 15% of adolescents. An average of 8% of children live in step-families (one parent plus partner), rising to 12% in most of the Nordic countries and the UK (OECD *"Doing Better for Our Children"*, p128, table 5.1).

The wellbeing of children is assessed in the OECD report on several dimensions: economic condition, physical wellbeing, and opportunities for development, (OECD *"Doing Better for our Children"*), all of which are of concern to parents. The economic dimension includes meeting basic material needs of the family, which increasingly involves both paternal and maternal paid employment.

### Impact of parental employment on children

In a cluster of recent studies conducted in Finland, most adolescents had positive perceptions of their parents' work, realising that long hours are necessary. Adolescent positive perceptions of parental work were associated with developmentally sound parenting. These positive perceptions of parents' work correlated with better interpersonal relationships between parents and children. One study compared data collected from adolescents with data collected from parents concerning their jobs. There existed a positive correlation between the mothers' positive job motivation and the adolescents' positive attitudes toward school, as well as between the fathers' job motivation and their supervision. The father's higher educational level correlated with lower levels of adolescent depression (Sallinen *et al*, 2004). The example of parental work habits seems to impact favourably on children and is particularly important in breaking generational cycles of dependency on welfare.

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<sup>14</sup> Of note is the system in France, which gives cash allotments to parents to purchase childcare as they judge best. The PAJE (Prestation d'Accueil du Jeune Enfant) provides financial help for families with young children including an allowance for whatever chosen care solution, « complément de libre choix du mode de garde »



In the same study, it was found that stress from parental employment issues was carried home with parents as a 'general stressful feeling', which affected their parenting and in turn was experienced by adolescents through increased conflict and reduced autonomy. Negative spillover from the father's employment correlated with adolescent boys' negative attitude to school and externalising behaviour manifested as aggression. For adolescent girls, spillover from parental job stress correlated with internalising behaviour manifested in depression and lower self-esteem (Sallinen, 2004). One researcher hypothesised that mother's bad mood on returning from work may be due in part to the domestic work she faces (Wierda-Boer, 2004).

### **Non-correspondence between school day and work day**

Children's short school day compared to parents' long work day may force children to stay several hours in the afternoon without adult supervision. Pulkkinen (2004) has proposed an integrated school day<sup>15</sup> for building a better match between the school, parents' work, and shared family time. A three-year experiment showed that an integrated school day reduces children's anxiety and depression (Metsäpelt & Pulkkinen, 2010) and improves social behaviour, working skills, and school success if music and art are added to the program.

### **Flexible and Part-time work hours**

Flexible hours and part-time work are seen by many mothers as allowing them the flexibility to more closely monitor and work for the wellbeing of their child(ren). Part-time work is offered by 80% of employers in the Netherlands, which has the highest percentage of women engaged in part-time work in Europe. It is noteworthy that the UNICEF report card for 2007 rates the wellbeing of children in the Netherlands as the highest. (See Chapter 6, Recommendations for Policy Makers.)

Children need to be able to depend on their parents, and mothers and fathers need time with their children. Parental investment of time with their children can be a major factor in their wellbeing, including scholastic success, ability to resist risk-related behaviours, and development of life skills such as internal control and good work habits<sup>16</sup>.

Furthermore, children's voices should and can be taken into account. Adults typically organise children's lives without listening to them. It would be important to study how children experience long daycare days or lonely afternoons when parents are working and there is no adult supervision. Even small children can express how they miss parents and how stressful they

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<sup>15</sup> "Integrated school day" refers to a new learning culture with different learning, care, and leisure activities organized cooperatively among several professions on the school premises, which lengthens the time at school to more closely match parental working hours.

<sup>16</sup> Regarding "*scholastic success*", research in Norway studied the effects that plant closure and the resulting loss of parents' jobs have on their children's scholastic grade-point average. When a father lost his job in communities where the labour market was mediocre, the children's grade-point average declined, which was associated with the children's worry about the threat to the father's financial support of the family. When a mother lost her job, the children's grades improved, evidently by the mother's increased attention to child-rearing (Rege *et al.*, 2007).

see their family life. Children's perceptions of parenthood and adults are important for their future. More attention should be paid to them.<sup>17</sup>

### **Impact of parental relationships in adolescence**

Parental responsibility and investment does not end when children enter their teen years. Of great concern to mothers, as expressed in personal interviews and focus groups, are the activity and wellbeing of their children during after-school hours. In the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*, 83% per cent of mothers disagreed with the statement that *"adolescent children can take care of themselves after school"*. Of all agree/disagree statements in the questionnaire, this statement received the strongest rejection. In the same survey, a full 92% of mothers answered that having working hours coincide with school hours was of high importance, and a large majority expressed the preference for part-time paid employment until the child is 18 years or older.

Experienced mothers know that adolescents need parental attention, and that the strength of an adolescent child's trust and openness to mother is dependent on the relationship formed and sustained from the earliest moments of life. Adolescent equilibrium and self management grow out of parental connection (Neufeld, 2004). Lea Pulkkinen's 30-year longitudinal study of youth in Finland shows a strong association between observed and reported measures of parent behaviour and relationship with the child at age eight and a child's subsequent success in secondary school, in dealing with addiction and anti-social behaviour, in the transition to employment, in the assumption of adult responsibility, in the transition to partnership, and in parenting behaviour in maturity. (See Bibliography in Pulkkinen, 2010.)

Marjukka Sallinen and colleagues summed up a survey of research on adolescent behaviour and parental relationships with these phrases: *"it is vital for adolescents' development that they have warm relationships with their parents, especially since a close parental relationship seems to function as a protective factor in coping with changes in life and may prevent depression"*. *"Adolescents with a poor parental bonding relationship (e.g., low care, high 'affectionless' control) seem to be more vulnerable to depression in the face of adverse life events than adolescents with more optimal bonding relationships"* (Sallinen et al., 2007: 182).

Of the mothers surveyed in the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*, 97% reported good to very good relationships with their children: *"Having stable and harmonious relationships"* was very important (88%), as was *"having sufficient time to spend with them"* (84%) and *"being able to set and maintain boundaries and limits"* (73%). Again quoting Sallinen et al., *"it may not be the frequency of conflicts but the failure of conflict resolution that is important for adolescents' well being... [S]uccess in conflict resolution... decreased... the link between adolescent-mother conflict and adolescent depression. In other words, if such conflicts ended in a positive solution, they did not have negative bearing on adolescent mood"* (op. cit.).

Adolescents who reported a warm relationship with mother and father have been shown to have significantly better health when they become mature adults. Thirty-five years after young

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<sup>17</sup> For example, The Children's Society employed age appropriate techniques such as children's drawings and compositions to gather views and perceptions of family life from 30,000 children and teen-agers for its recent study titled *A Good Childhood* (London: The Children's Society, 2009) The study is available at <http://www.childrenssociety.org.uk>.

college students at Harvard University reported not having a warm relationship with their parents, these same people were suffering from twice the incidence of diagnosed disease in midlife (91%) as compared to students who reported having a close relationship with parents (45%). The researchers in this continuing longitudinal study stated *"Since parents are usually the most meaningful source of social support in early life, the perception of parental love and caring may have important effects on biological and psychological health and illness throughout life"* (Russek et al., 1997).

### **Impact of family meals on adolescent substance abuse**

Of further concern to mothers are adolescent eating habits and life-styles which lead to obesity and addictive behaviours. While it is more difficult for families to find time to prepare and to eat a meal together, mothers intuitively sense that there are crucial benefits beyond better nutrition which include facilitating communication, improving family cohesion and interpersonal relationships, and maintaining order. *"Time spent in meals at home is likely to be associated with a more stable, organized family life, and therefore with children having fewer behaviour problems"* (Jacob et al., 2008). Marie-Josée Mozin, president of the European Association of Infant Dietitians, summed up the observations of her group of professionals: *"When meals are disorganized, often nothing is in order: neither rest time, nor the duration of evening sleep, nor schoolwork, nor physical activities. The loss of all these reference points is the source of anguish experienced by some children"* (Moizin, 2007).

The practice of family dinners five or more times a week has been associated also with children's resistance to substance abuse and also better academic performance. (CASA Columbia 2010)<sup>18</sup>

### **Parents and adolescent delinquent behavior**

As we have been reminded by Katerina Batzeli, Member of the European Parliament and rapporteur, *"parental supervision and control is essential in preventing delinquent behaviour in their children. Parents are recognised as responsible for cultivating compliance with and respect for the law"* (European Parliament, FEMM committee hearing on Juvenile Delinquency, 2007). Whether parents are active in paid employment or not, in a mother's own eyes and in the eyes of society and of the law, parents are held accountable for children's anti-social and criminal behaviour<sup>19</sup>.

Lea Pulkkinen's ongoing Finnish Jyväskylä Longitudinal Study of Personality and Social Development (Pulkkinen, 2006, 2009) started in 1968 with 8-year-old children. The study has continued up to middle age. It shows a strong association between child-centred parenthood and successful development in children. Child-centred parenthood at age 14 includes the parents' trust in the child, knowledge about his/her free-time, company and activities, encouragement and interest in the child's school attendance and opinions, consistency in child rearing, advice and praise to the child, and no corporal punishment. In most cases, the

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<sup>18</sup> National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University, [www.casacolumbia.org](http://www.casacolumbia.org)

<sup>19</sup> In a recent civil court case in Milano, Italy parents were held accountable for their sons' crime and were ordered by the judge to pay 450,000 Euros in damages to a young girl who was raped repeatedly by the boys. The judge noted that the boys thought their behaviour was normal, and said that the parents should have educated their boys to *"abide by rules and to respect the feelings of others"*. Broadcast on BBC Europe Today, 5 February 2010 at 17h05 (UK time).

adolescents' perception of how their parents treated them was more significant for their development than what the parents said about their parenting behavior.

A sample of findings shows that child-centred parenthood reported by young people at the age of 14 is associated with measured adolescents' higher prosocial skills, particularly constructive behavior (Pulkkinen, 1982). Constructive behavior in turn predicts many positive outcomes in adulthood (Pulkkinen, 2001), marital stability (Kinnunen & Pulkkinen, 2003), career success (Pulkkinen, Feldt, & Kokko, 2006), and income (Viinikainen, Kokko, Pulkkinen & Pehkonen, 2010). Child-centred parenthood is also associated with children's lower delinquent behavior in adolescence and adulthood (Pulkkinen, 1983; Männikkö & Pulkkinen, 2001), lower unemployment (Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2000), less problem drinking at ages 27 and 42 (Pitkänen, Kokko, Lyyra & Pulkkinen, 2008), and higher temperance, that is, self-regulation as it is reflected in many aspects of life (Pulkkinen & Pitkänen, 2010).

### **Competition with the screen**

In MMMEurope's preliminary focus groups and expert interviews, mothers expressed their concern for the intrusive nature of "screens" and other electronic technology in their family life. One mother cited "monster arguments" over the amount of time adolescents spent with their "screens". Another mentioned the reluctance some parents had in setting limits. When the parents returned from work they wanted to avoid conflict and thus ignored the excessive amount of time their child devoted to virtual games, chat rooms, or other electronic entertainment, often at the expense of academic preparation or rest.

### **Summary**

Parents desire to invest in their children. They have a natural sense of responsibility and a concern to act effectively. Ultimately, they are held responsible by society for negative outcomes. These motivations, concerns, and responsibilities should be acknowledged and considered seriously in any discussion or implementation of state policy. Many tensions experienced by mothers derive from the impact of employment and taxation policy on the range of child rearing and family choices parents believe they have. Information and awareness of the consequences of state policies on parent and child wellbeing are necessary for wise decision making. **Parental engagement and effectiveness in rearing the rising generation will impact the long-term sustainability of European society more surely than many other matters presently considered important.**

## Chapter 3 – Mothers' Employment and Family Life

*"Everyone has the right to engage in work and to pursue a freely chosen or accepted occupation"*

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, Article 15 (1)

*"Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance"*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25 (2)

*"Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay. The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages in favour of the under-represented sex"* Charter of

Fundamental Rights of the EU (Article 23)

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Mothers have always worked. Throughout all of history, mothers have given birth to children, nourished and nurtured family members, and laboured on the family farm or enterprise. The Industrial Revolution brought new opportunities to exchange one's time and effort for money through employment for both men and women. Later, while men fought in world wars, many more women learned to manage paid employment and domestic care. When peace returned, men and women wanted a home and children, resulting in large population growth. The predominant family pattern was the complementary division of labour where one parent worked outside the home in return for a wage which supported the family, while the work of the other parent furnished the informal care of family members, in the shared parental objective to invest their lives in the advancement and upbringing of the next generation. The possibility for one adult to work away from the home depended on the commitment of another adult to maintain the home and care for the children. This model of mutual trust and complementarity is mainly based on interdependence and appreciation for mutually advantageous contributions.

During this same time of peace and prosperity, modern medical advances have increased health and longevity and have decreased the need for home nursing care. Women's ability to control their fertility means they can time their childbearing, resulting in greater and more predictable availability for out-of-home activity. Women's increasing educational achievement and employment possibilities along with the goal of gender equality, have opened new opportunities. In addition, couple relationships are more often formed on the basis of affection and with a focus on individual fulfilment within a partnership of equals. There is a decreased emphasis on rearing the next generation, and families are smaller.

Mothers have always been active and will continue to work, whether in the paid labour force or in unpaid family care or in combination. However, as increasing numbers of women advance into the world of employment, which rewards their efforts with money and status, the unpaid and quiet work of caring is not recognised, counted, esteemed, nor rewarded.

**Mothers have always worked, but what has changed is the world around them and the devaluation of the work of caring which they have always done.** In the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*, through their messages to policy makers, mothers are clearly claiming that their

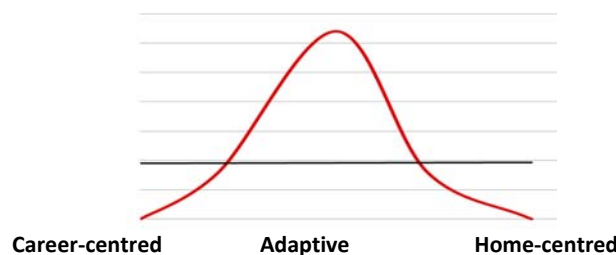
devoted unpaid work should be recognised and valued as a vital and irreplaceable investment in the future of society<sup>20</sup>.

## What do Women want?

Catherine Hakim has surveyed women, including those who are childless, in various countries concerning their “*work-lifestyle preferences*”. She found that women’s answers fell into three clusters distributed similarly across the sampled European countries. A minority of women varying from 10% to 30% named career as their top priority. A larger proportion, varying from 40% to 80% of those polled, preferred to combine paid employment with family care. Finally, another minority of women varying from 10% to 30% of respondents expressed a preference for full-time engagement in home-making and motherhood. Hakim named these groups respectively “*work-centred*”, “*adaptive*” and “*home-centred*” (Hakim, 2009).

Conceptually we hypothesised that these three positions could be imagined to fall along a continuum running from strongly career-centred at one extreme to strongly home-centred at the opposite extreme. We further hypothesised that mothers would choose to allocate their time between career and home as a function of the circumstances and needs they perceived, and that the relative proportions of choices along the hypothesised continuum would approximate a bell-shaped distribution such as that shown in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Hypothesized Distribution of European Women’s Work-Preferences



## What do Mothers want?

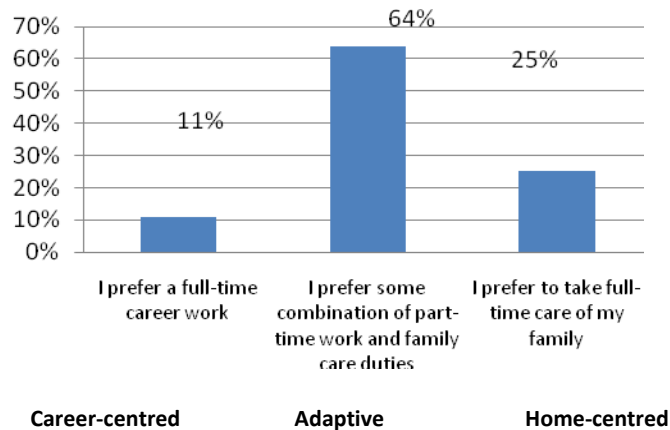
Hakim’s sample included many women who are not mothers. Since our mandate is to represent mothers, we decided to explore how the distribution of mothers’ responses might compare with the hypothesised bell-shaped pattern.

<sup>20</sup> In the Survey of Mothers in Europe about 30% of all messages to policymakers included a claim for better recognition of the unpaid work of caring for others.

In our 2010 *Survey of Mothers in Europe*, we therefore posed to mothers three options for expressing their preference for full-time paid employment and full-time unremunerated family care or some combination of the two. Some 8,720 mothers responded to these questions.

Figure 3.2: Mothers' Expressed Work Preference according to Survey of Mothers in Europe 2010

Q. Surveys\* have asked women their preferences concerning paid work. About 20% choose to centre their lives on a career, about 60% would like to combine paid work with family care duties, and about 20% would prefer to centre their lives on full-time unpaid family care duties. What would be your preference? (\*Dr Catherine Hakim....)



N = 8720, one possible answer

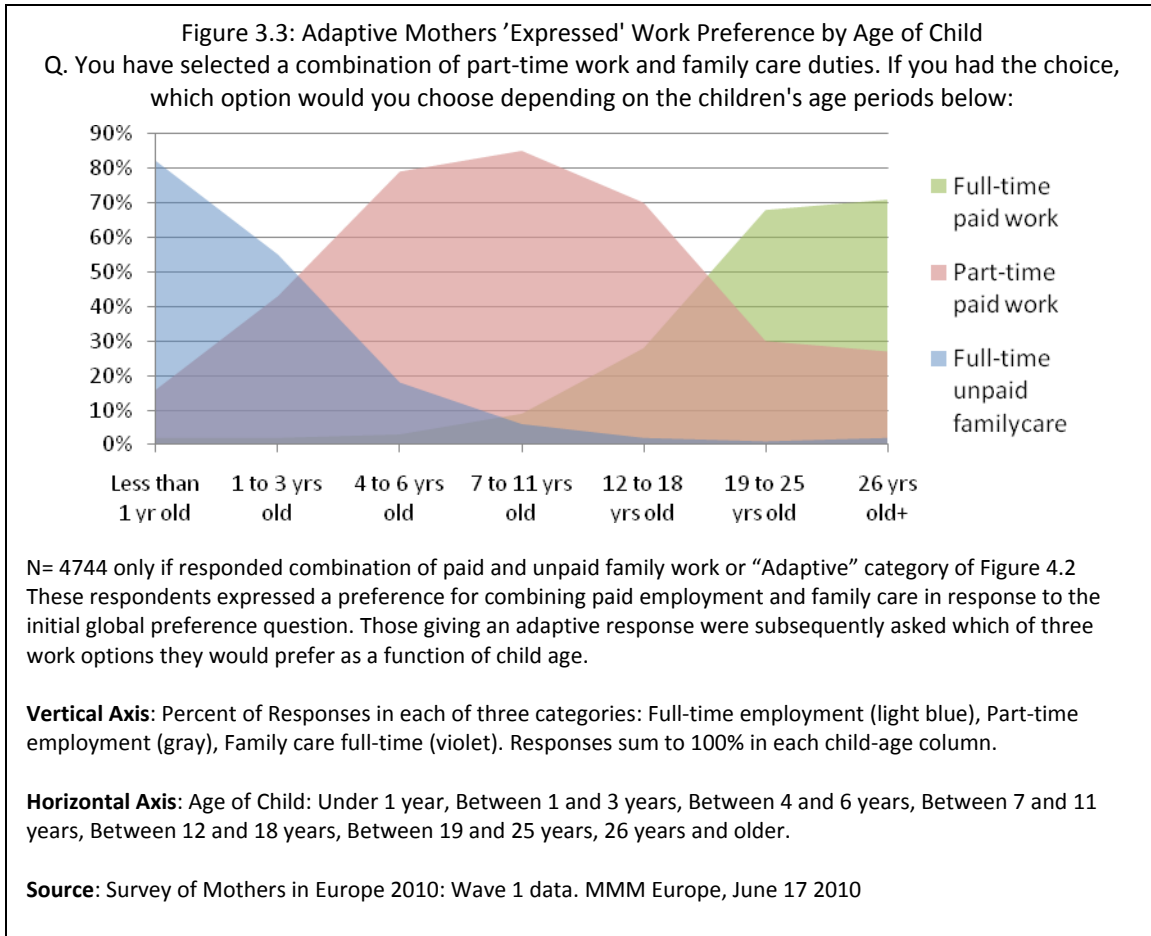
Source: Survey of Mothers in Europe 2010: Wave 1 data. MMM Europe, June 17 2010

The frequency of the responding mothers' expressed preferences is plotted in Figure 3.2. At one extreme, a minority of 11% expressed preference for a full-time career. A large proportion of respondents, 64%, would prefer to somehow combine paid employment with family care. One in four of all respondents expressed a clear preference for full-time homemaking<sup>21</sup>.

For mothers in the "*adaptive*" group preferring to combine paid employment with family care we posed additional questions to determine the degree to which their choice would vary as a function of the age of children in the home. The results of this study are shown in Figure 3.3. The tops of the bars are connected to call attention to the way the preferences of the responding mothers varied as a function of their perception of the needs of children of differing ages.

About 80% of these "*adaptive*" mothers wish to take care of their small children 0-3 years of age at home with 20% expressing the desire for part-time work. For children 4-6 years, 50% of "*adaptive*" mothers prefer to work part-time, increasing to 80% once obligatory school begins, and continuing through to age 18. Full-time work is not preferred for most "*adaptive*" mothers until after the child reaches the age of 18.

<sup>21</sup> Other surveys having similar results include: **France**: According to a TNS-Sofres survey 57% of mothers with children younger than 2 years stay at home, and 90% of them have chosen it (They are not on unemployment.), "*Mamans à plein temps*," 24 December 2009; **Germany**: Family Network Germany, see [www.familie-ist-zukunft.de](http://www.familie-ist-zukunft.de); **UK**: "What women want", Cristina Odone, [http://www.cps.org.uk/cps\\_catalog/what%20women%20want.pdf](http://www.cps.org.uk/cps_catalog/what%20women%20want.pdf); **USA**: "Fewer Mothers Prefer Full-time Work, from 1997 to 2007", Pew Research Center, July 12, 2007, <http://pewsocialtrends.org/pubs/536/working-women>.



Thus, it is seen that 74-90% of mothers in Europe, both those in the work-centred and adaptive groups, want to work at some point in their lives. As stated above, their right to work is recognised in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU Article 15:1.

It can also be seen that 91% of mothers, both those in the adaptive and home-centred groups, express a preference for caring for their own children, and for the “adaptive” mothers, in varying amounts of time according to age of the child. Their right to choose the kind of education given to their children is recognised in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26:3) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU (Article 14:3) as stated in Chapter 2.

There is a pattern to the seasons in the life of a mother. There are seasons when her family concerns call for more presence and investment in her children, and there are seasons when she feels free to work longer hours outside the home. The needs of her children as indicated by their age in the survey questions are a key determinant. “*What do mothers want?*” Most mothers want the possibility to commit to service away from their children only when they are satisfied that their children will not be diminished by the diversion of their focus. Policy makers who consider these preferences and patterns are more likely to propose and implement wise and effective decisions.



## The Right to Work, the Right to Care

The right to work in paid employment and the right to engage in unpaid care work must both be recognised and supported by government policy and decision makers. Because of the diversity of conditions and preferences, no one-size-fits-all causes or solutions can answer the needs of citizens. States must allow citizens to make their own choices about their family life.

For those mothers who desire to work while children are young, there must be quality support that makes it possible. Therefore the reconciliation of paid work and family life takes high priority in the European Commission's conception, especially the provision of childcare and birth leaves which enable mothers to work, thereby lowering the risk of poverty and decreasing government spending on welfare. Women's work also increases the labour supply, keeping ever better-educated women in employment. This increases the *"growth potential of the economy and strengthens the ability of a country to meet the challenges of an ageing society"* (European Commission Demography report, 2008: 103-4). States are also concerned with increasing tax revenues, and women's work is seen as another way to accomplish this goal.

Another means of reconciliation is offered in flexible or part-time work. In their overview of family management in Europe, Blasko & Herche find that *"young mothers decrease their labour market activity in each European country with the exception of Malta and they do so to quite a significant extent in some of them"* (Blasko & Herche 2010, 12). This action results from the change in responsibilities and priorities discussed in Chapter 1 on the transition to motherhood. Not surprisingly, at the introduction of new priorities mothers see employment and its demands in a different context and become more sensitive to working hours and conditions.

The priorities of mothers come through clearly in the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*: 99% of respondents consider it *"important"* or *"very important"* to have sufficient time with family and to reconcile work and family life harmoniously. Furthermore, when offered the possibility to send a message to Europe's policy makers, 30% expressed concern about aspects of work/family balance including maternity and parental leave, flexible working hours and conditions of work, the availability of part-time work, and the correlation of work schedules with school calendars and schedules. Additional responses of mothers relative to work/family balance are found in Annex I. School holidays include 8-9 weeks in summer versus parent work holidays of 2-4 weeks. Children and adolescents can't be left to their own devices or on the street while parent(s) work<sup>22</sup>.

Speaking to a conference organised in 2009 by the European Commission, Marie-Thérèse Letablier said: *"It is often argued that employment-related policies are most cost-effective, since they combine different objectives. In this case, however, the support needs to be sufficiently wide ranging to meet the needs of families. Thus, policies that encourage parents, living alone or with partners, to be in work are found to offer an efficient means of reducing the risk of poverty, while raising the standard of living of families with children and promoting greater gender equality in the labour market. Higher employment rates can also generate a higher income for the state by means of taxation, which can contribute to the funding of social and family policies. This virtuous circle can be achieved, however, only if the support provided is sufficient to meet the basic needs*

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<sup>22</sup> Cities in the USA like Chicago descend into the savagery of gang violence during the summer (see the newspaper article "Cities Brace for Summer Crime" in "USA Today", 30 June 2010). This article discusses community efforts to help children when there is no one at home.

*of families and to help both parents combine work and family life and to share caring tasks. If the policy is too narrowly focused on work, it does neither improve the standard of living of families, nor prevent income inequalities, nor promote child development or higher fertility rates... The most positive outcomes are observed in countries where support is wide ranging" (Letablier et al., 2009: 5).*

Because of the diverse desires and needs of mothers, and their distinctive life-course, there must be **choice** and **policies free from ideology**.

## **Unpaid Work**

While we stress the importance of women's participation in the labour force, for themselves, for their family and for society, in this section we chose to concentrate on the importance of the unpaid care work. The European Union largely encourages and promotes women's participation in the labour force but the value of unpaid work still needs to be recognised.

The value to society of the investment in unpaid care work is expressed by Commissioner Andor: *"In all Member States, women are more likely to be carers. They are more likely to provide physically intimate, emotionally demanding, and longer-term care. The value of this work in human, social and economic terms is enormous and we would not be able to cope without it"* (Speech to European Parliament inter-group on caring, May 2010)

The inclusion of unpaid work in the GDP would also help in the recognition of its value to society. There is a clear trend of claims coming from experts, groups and organisations who are asking for the inclusion of unpaid work in GDP.

In the Stiglitz report, we find: *"There have been major changes in how households and society function. For example, many of the services people received from other family members in the past are now purchased on the market. This shift translates into a rise in income as measured in the national accounts and may give a false impression of a change in living standards, while it merely reflects a shift from non-market to market provision of services. Many services that households produce for themselves are not recognized in official income and production measures, yet they constitute an important aspect of economic activity. While their exclusion from official measures reflects uncertainty about data more than conceptual difficulties, there has been progress in this arena; still, more and more systematic work in this area should be undertaken. This should start with information on how people spend their time that is comparable both over the years and across countries. Comprehensive and periodic accounts of household activity as satellites to the core national accounts should complement the picture. In developing countries, the production of goods (for instance food or shelter) by households plays an important role. Tracking the production of such home-produced goods is important to assess consumption levels of households in these countries"*<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> The measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress Revisited OFCE - N° 2009-33; DECEMBER 2009 (Recommendation 5: *Broaden income measures to non-market activities*, 26) Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress (Joseph E. STIGLITZ, Amartya SEN, Jean-Paul FITOUSSI) summary: <http://www.ofce.sciences-po.fr/pdf/documents/summary.pdf>, or <http://www.stiglitz-sen-fitoussi.fr/en/index.htm>.

And from the Council of Europe comes another call to include unpaid care work in the GDP: *“Lastly, family upbringing must also be taken into account as time devoted to children also adds to wellbeing and indirectly increases GDP. More generally speaking, activities carried out by women in the home such as housework and preparing meals must be brought into the equation, as in some Council of Europe member states such as Germany and Finland these activities account for about 30% of GDP”*<sup>24</sup>.

In her recent article published in the New York Times, "*The Female Factor, the Stigma of Being a Housewife*", Katrin Bennhold discusses what has happened in Sweden and Norway where "housewives" have become so stigmatised that they are embarrassed to be known as such. "*When it is no longer socially acceptable to be a housewife...has feminism overshot its objective?*". She further comments, "*Social engineering is a blunt tool, and some worry that the freedom of working mothers has come at the expense of making outcasts of a minority who want to do things differently*". Bennhold then quotes H  l  ne P  rivier, an economist at the Institut d'  tudes Politiques in Paris. "*[An] effective way might be to finally and formally recognise the contribution housewives make to the economy... It's not about being paid; it's about being valued... If ever there was a time to include unpaid housework and care work in GDP figures, it is now*". Bennhold concludes, saying, "*Working mothers have a stake in this too: They still do most of the unpaid work in their homes—even in Sweden*"<sup>25</sup>.

Mothers' voices:

- ✓ "A mother has legal status when she is paid to care for children who are not her own. Why can she not have recognition and legal status for caring for her own children? Please recognise the unpaid care work a mother does in her own home."
- ✓ "Why stigmatise a full-time mother who is caring for her own children, by classifying her as "not working", while a nanny who cares for the children is "working?"

## Gender Equality

Equality between women and men is multi-faceted, including the possibility for hiring and advancement without discrimination and equal pay for equivalent qualification and work. With more women entering the labour force, attention has been called to the “*second shift*” of domestic work which is accomplished after the work day, mostly by women.

*“There is a strong gender aspect involved in this topic (of employment). Paid and unpaid work is distributed unequally between men and women in European society... Despite the efforts taken by several European societies to create policy environment that conforms men and women equally, gender remains a substantial factor of the work distributing behaviour in the labour market as well as in the household” (Blasko & Herche, 2010).*

In an effort to bring about equality between women and men in both paid employment and unpaid care work, the individualisation of social security rights and tax law in some member

<sup>24</sup> Council of Europe, Doc. 12199, 9 April 2010, “*Wealth, welfare, and well-being: How to reconcile them in a changing Europe?*” Report Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr. Konstantinos VRETTOS, paragraph 39. For countries which conduct time-use studies including unpaid care work, see International Association for Time Use Research <http://www.iatur.org/>

<sup>25</sup> In the New York Times, July 20, 2010; [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/21/world/europe/21iht-LETTER.html?\\_r=1&scp=4&sq=Katrin%20bennhold&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/21/world/europe/21iht-LETTER.html?_r=1&scp=4&sq=Katrin%20bennhold&st=cse).

states strips benefits derived from a spouse's employment for mothers engaging in unpaid family care work. This is to provide an *"incentive"* for home-makers to seek paid employment (Julémont, 2006). This individualisation is perceived as coercion and exerts economic pressure on women and their families. How does this reconcile with rights recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Article 25 (2) states: *"Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance"*. Furthermore the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 23 states: *"Equality between men and women must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay. The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of measures providing for specific advantages in favour of the under-represented sex"*.

Coercion is rationalised by some in the name of gender equality in the work-place and in the home, in order to alter the imbalance of power thought to exist between traditional earner/carer roles, which are seen as being adverse to mothers and women in general (see COFACE, 2006).

*"Coercion will always have its attractions for those able to do the coercing, but, as a source of enlightened progress, the subjugation of the individual in the interests of the community has lost much of its appeal"* (*"Onwards and upwards"*, *The Economist*, December 19, 2009). To recognise a mother's right to chose is consistent with the principle of subsidiarity, one of the pillars of the European Union.

Those who pursue equality between women and men should work towards ensuring access to social protection, pension credits and social security for those who perform the unpaid care work and services inside the family.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe states: *"Governments and where appropriate social partners should ensure that women can participate in and benefit from full and equal access to social protection systems. Social protection policies should be reviewed where appropriate in order to take full account of the work and care responsibilities of women and men throughout the life cycle"*<sup>26</sup>.

There is also concern that birth leaves impact women's employment in general. Because of the cost and the inconvenience of hiring temporary replacement for the employed mother during her absence and in some countries paying salary support for the mother on birth leave, employers may take defensive action by not hiring women of child-bearing age or if hired, birth leaves may impact salary level or career advancement. Thus birth leaves are judged by some to be counter-productive to equality between women and men, in both pay and position (Hantrais, 2006; MOCHO, 2004).

The pay differential between men and women has been greater in Sweden than it was four decades ago and greater than at present in countries with less developed parental leave and subsidised child care. Also in Sweden employment tends to be more segregated: more women work in lower-paying public sector jobs and more men are employed by private companies at higher salary levels (Plantenga, 2006: 30; Hakim, 2004). However, the recent Eurochild study (2010) claims that the gender pay gap in Sweden is about the same as the EU average of 17%.

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<sup>26</sup> UNECE/AC.23/2002/2/Rev. 6, p.19 # 84

Meanwhile the statisticians writing for UNECE, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, noted that in countries with high numbers of women in the labour force the gender pay gap is greater (UNECE, 2010). Clearly more research needs to be done on possible unintended consequences of policies and incentives intended to improve equality between women and men in employment (see Chapter 6 for recommendations for future research).

Birth leaves do interrupt a mother's career, but putting a time limit on salary support tends to draw mothers back into the labour force at the conclusion of the leave rather than dropping out of the work force for a more extended period of time (see Crosby & Hawkes, 2008 for a comparison study of birth leave effect on early maternal employment in the UK and USA).

### **Parenting experience enhances managerial abilities**

It is frequently argued that a prolonged leave from employment causes a mother to lose job competence and become less employable without further training to enhance employability. But while job requirements evolve with the passage of time, the skills and sensitivities of mothers are also evolving. Skills developed through nurturing, communicating, leading, teaching, resolving conflict, scheduling, intervening with authorities and services and otherwise managing home and children and their development have wide applicability in all branches of paid employment. As Catelene Passchier, Confederal Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, argued before the European Parliament, *"the informal qualifications acquired during the 'family phase' are undervalued and underrated"* (Passchier, 2008). Awareness of this fact led the European Commission to launch the 2006-2009 *FamCompass* project which developed and tested instruments to evaluate skills learned in managing a home and caring for children and the elderly<sup>27</sup>. A recent best-selling book is in fact titled *If you can raise kids, you can manage anything* (Crittenden, 2004).

### **Life Satisfaction**

Those who are employed show higher life satisfaction than those who are not-employed, even when there are children in the household, provided that there is not an excessive workload, either from professional or family obligations. When women experience substantial stress from excessive workload, there is less life satisfaction than with housewives (Eurofound EQLS II, 2010: 63).

Work/family balance for mothers and fathers is indeed an important element of quality of life. Half of the workers in the EU indicate that after work they are sometimes too tired to do the household chores, while for almost a quarter of workers, this happens several times a week (Eurofound EQLS II, 2010: 30).

Concerning life satisfaction levels of mothers, the 2010 *Survey of Mothers in Europe* found that mothers who are in full-time work are less likely to be satisfied with life as a mother than those mothers who are on maternity leave, parental leave, part-time work or full-time at home.

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<sup>27</sup> See <http://www.famcompass.eu> and <http://www.hig.be> for more information.

Voices of mothers from the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*:

- ✓ *"I am not able to see my daughter grow up, and I wonder why have children? It is a race 24 hours per day which has an effect on family life. I have permanent stress because of the difficulty of managing my job and my family. There is a lot of frustration involved, but we have no choice because we need the money to survive."*
- ✓ *"I have to rise at 5:30 each morning, wake the little ones at 6:00 to be at the garderie for the older one at 7:00 and the babysitter for the baby. My husband (who has started his day at 4:30) picks them up at 17:30 and cares for them until I return about 18:30. We are all exhausted and stressed out."*
- ✓ *"My work, including the commute takes much time. I am out of the house 12 hours per day, and I don't see my husband or son in the morning before leaving, and when returning in the evenings, the time must be spent on meals, baths, and bedtime. The stress builds during the day and spills over at home, and the quality of our relationship suffers."*
- ✓ *"I am a pharmacist and therefore must keep business hours which do not coincide with school hours. A mother's helper transports the two children to and from school and keeps them until 20:00, and the next morning at 7:00 the day begins again. Weeks pass and I miss out on the special moments with my children which ought to be a mother's joy."*

The recently published Eurofound report titled "*Second European Quality of Life Survey: Family life and work*" states that people in the Nordic countries, the Benelux countries and France found that they lack time to carry out all their tasks, and that time spent at work competes with time that should be spent with family, friends, and personal interests. People in the German-speaking countries and Anglo-Saxon countries seemed to find it easier to balance work and family life. In their report, this relative ease is associated with the lower proportion of dual wage earners in couples and the smaller number of single mothers in employment (Eurofound EQLS II, 2010: 54).

The full-time dual earner model can generate considerable stress when children are born. Further stress develops in the mother's years between 18 and 40, her season of childbearing and child rearing. This season when family demands peak has been described as the "*rush hour*" of life. Combining full time work with children at home during this season of life, requires a high degree of energy that some very efficient mothers may have. But there are many who do not have the strength or the will<sup>28</sup>.

Is the full-time dual earner model to be encouraged by the EU during the whole course of family life, or can it be acknowledged that there are seasons in the life of families that have to be taken into account? (See Chapter 6 for or recommendations to policy makers.)

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<sup>28</sup> In Sweden a high incidence of early retirement of women due to psychosocial stress is noted; and baseline assessments of stress at work and stress in the family were more important determinants of ill health than were life-style (smoking, alcohol intake, and exercise) and standard risk factors (lipid and hemostatic profile, blood pressure, and obesity). Orth-Gomér et al, 2005, in *Läkartidningen Medical journal*. In France, Fatima Bouvet de la Maisonneuve, psychiatrist, who treats alcoholism in women says that "burn-out" is the final stage of stress in women, who "over-invest in work and suffer a lack of recognition in return." Three women for every two men suffer from it. The business world sanctions life-choices, hours are not compatible with family life, and career advancement is frequently denied them. <http://madame.lefigaro.fr/societe/en-kiosque/3066-40-ans-femmes-au-bord-de-la-crise/1>

## Chapter 4 – Couple and Family Relationships

*“The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State”*

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16 (3)

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European surveys investigating what matters most to people consistently show that family is the most important value (Eurofound, 2007). Family relationships and connections are central to most lives, and the family is where people turn when in need of help or care: *“The family remains the first port of call for personal support in emergencies”* (Eurofound, 2007).

In Chapter 2, we already addressed the importance of parental involvement and its impact on children’s behaviour, and their physical and psychological health. In this chapter, we will specifically focus on mothers in their couple relationships, the couple’s transition to parenthood, family break-up, ageing and multi-generational relationships.

### Couple Relationships

According to various studies, the model of the family based on marriage is evolving into a plurality of forms, including couples united in civil union or cohabiting, and, increasingly, forms derived from the break-down of a previous union, such as single-parent families, step-families, and single person households. This is particularly true of younger and older age groups. For Europeans in the middle group aged 35-49, however, the most common family form is having a father and a mother with child(ren) (Eurofound, 2007: 16; Eurostat Yearbook, 2009).

Nowadays, the couple relationship is increasingly likely to be based on affection, self-realisation, equality, and autonomy. Bearing these assumptions in mind, the limits and purposes of a union are likely to be set as a result of the interplay between two equal partners who remain united only for as long as the union is fully satisfying and meets adults' emotional needs, with less consideration to providing for children's needs of security and attachment. Thus there is increasing instability in couple relationships, along with a feeling of risk-taking for a woman, that, in the event of a rupture, she may be left alone to support and raise the children, and for a man, that he may lose contact with his children (ANF 2006; Lardellier, 2009: 63; Rutgers, 2007).

Respondents in the *Survey of Mothers in Europe* were asked to rate their partner relationships, after which they were asked to rate a list of ten factors which may have an impact on their couple relationship. Reporting a “very good” relationship were 56% of respondents, and a “good” relationship 35% for a total of 91%. The most frequently selected “very important” factor is “Respect, love and tolerance” (92%). This was followed by “share same values” (70%) and “being in agreement/disagreement on how to rear children” (65%). The factors reported as “important” are “financial situation” (65%), “relationship with your extended family (parents, brothers/sisters, etc.)” (57%), and “quality of your sexual relations” (57%), and “sharing of tasks, depending on availability” (50%).

## Transition to Parenthood

At the present time more women are educated and enter full-time employment, resulting in financial independence and autonomy. Many dual-earner couples seek to share domestic work. For dual-earner couples without children, parity in household duties may be attainable and practical. When the woman becomes pregnant with her first baby, the specialisation of reproductive roles leads to new understanding of the mother's and the father's roles.

The birth of the child necessitates adaptation within the couple relationship. With couples for whom equality in the division of domestic work has been of high importance, the expectation level is high; there may thus be a sense of disillusionment in the difficulty, if not impossibility, of equalising infant care (Hoenisch, 2008) particularly when breast-feeding is involved. The mother will most likely take maternity leave to recuperate after the birth, if breast feeding, assume most of the infant care and, since she is at home, probably the house work as well. Mothers often readjust their career ambition to provide care for the child, whereas fathers tend to work longer to provide for the family's increased financial needs. The original ideal of equality in division of work will probably transform into more traditional and gendered roles in parenting and partnership (Eija Sevón, 2009).

Hopefully the couple will adapt to their new status, appreciating their complementary roles as advantageous. But if a mother evaluates the gender balance as “*unfair*” and the father's domestic involvement negatively, then it could reduce a father's participation and lower marital quality (Hawkins, *et al.*, 2008: 36). The more a mother perceives him as competent in domestic work, the more he may contribute to both childcare and housework (Huston & Holmes, 2004).

Regarding the reality of sharing work, in the MMMEurope Survey, of the 4200 mothers who responded to the question, 50% answered that they are regularly helped by their spouse, 45% occasionally, and only 5% answered that their spouse never helps. Seventy percent said they can count on their partner to look after the children regularly or occasionally, and 45% responded their spouse helped with transport of their children on a regular basis.

Help from extended family members is an important factor, with 58% of mothers saying that their parents help them tend their children, mostly on an occasional basis or when a child is sick. Parents and other members of the family are an important source of moral and social support. Parents are also a source of occasional financial support for 33% of respondents<sup>29</sup>.

## Family Relationships & Satisfaction

According to The Second European Quality of Life Survey, living together in a couple is related to higher life satisfaction, and life satisfaction is particularly high for couples with children. Happiness increases with a rise in the number of children in the family, with higher satisfaction expressed by parents of children under the age of two years, which suggests that increased family obligations do not necessarily lower life satisfaction. Not only having a family, but being

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<sup>29</sup> For a detailed discussion of the transition into parenthood, please see Barbara Stauber, Expert Report 1: Transition into Parenthood, FAMILYPLATFORM, 2010, available from <http://www.familyplatform.eu/en/1-major-trends/reports/2b-transitions-into-parenthood>.



able to call upon and receive support, whether financial or social, from extended family members leads to higher life satisfaction. Family relationships are associated with higher life satisfaction in Europe. However, a single parent with children displays the lowest satisfaction of all living arrangements, lower than non-partnered people living alone or with parents (Eurofound EQLS, 2007: 55-57). This fact is clearly confirmed by the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*, where mothers who are in a partner relationship are more likely to be satisfied than single, divorced or separated mothers (see Table 2 in Annex I).

Mothers were asked to agree or disagree with statements of opinion, and the highest rating (99%) agreed that *"healthy and good relationships within the family promote the emotional health of family members"* and 95% agreed that *"healthy and good relationships within the family promote physical health of family members"*.

## Single Mothers

When a couple relationship ruptures, the challenges are great for all concerned, but for the mother who most often has custody of the children, economic survival becomes a primary preoccupation. In the EU25, 32% of lone parent homes were living below the poverty threshold compared to 17 per cent of all households with dependent children (Roberts *et al.*, 2009). The mother's efforts are supplemented by whatever support comes from government or extended family. Supportive government policies include child/day care, child support, guaranteed minimum wages and equal access to high quality jobs, supportive housing policies, and social support (Roberts *et al.*, 2009).

One study examined causal effects of single parenthood on child outcomes, expecting to find that the large amount of redistribution towards single parents in the Nordic countries and their extensive provision of family services would reduce or eliminate causal factors that lead to worse results for these children in single parent families. But the findings suggested that other factors are involved and calls for further research: *"There is enough evidence to suggest that policy makers should be concerned about the implications of family structure for child wellbeing"* (Chapple & Richardson, 2009: 139).

According to studies reviewed by Roberts *et al.*, for children living in lone-parent homes, the educational outcomes are not as successful. There are mental and physical disadvantages for children living in lone-parent homes. A decline in household income may push lone-parent families into inappropriate housing and into neighbourhoods with lower quality schools.

Children living with single mothers miss out on parental investment of time that otherwise might occur in a two-parent family. *"There is little evidence that single parents compensate for the absent parent's time"* (Chapple, 2009). When mothers have custody, fathers may lose contact with their children. In the voice of one mother from the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*:

- ✓ *"Make it unacceptable for fathers to abandon their children. I work with young offenders, and the overwhelming common denominator is an absent father."*

Cycles of disadvantage and inequality tend to pass and recur from one generation to another. According to the OECD, there is strong evidence that welfare dependency is transmitted across generations (Chapple & Richardson, 2009: 139). In addition care must be taken that targeted

support does not stigmatise the recipients: *"A country where a child learns that life chances are restricted by the familial environment is a country that will fail to produce inspired and innovative children. Children's aspirations affect how they engage with education systems and the broader community around them"* (op. cit.: 158).

## Ageing and Multi-generational Relationships

In the stage of life for Europeans aged 65 and older, most men live with a partner and rely on their partner for assistance. On the contrary, a higher percentage of elderly women live alone than in a couple relationship. This is due in part to women's greater longevity. In countries of Eastern Europe where many of the younger population have migrated outward and birth rates are low, family resources for care of the elderly are projected to be more limited. In addition, policy measures encouraging women's employment may have the unintended consequence that family resources for care for the elderly in the future will be more limited, and more care resources will be needed in the community (*Eurofound 2<sup>nd</sup> EQLS*: 17-18).

Mothers responding to the 2010 *Survey of Mothers in Europe* want to keep their own independent housing as long as possible (73%). The second choice (39%) would elect to go to a retirement facility in order not to be a burden on children. Only 3% would like to live with one of their children (except in Eastern Europe where 7% would choose this option.)

Elderly women not only tend to live on average 6-8 years longer than men and to live out their lives alone, they are more likely to be poverty-stricken than elderly men, 22% compared with 17% in 2007 (Eurostat, 2010) This poverty reflects gender disadvantages during their life-course: career breaks for childbearing or caring, lower salaries, fewer hours spent in paid employment, and more unpaid care work (*UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing*, 2009). Additionally, policy driven by concerns for equality dictates the economic independence and autonomy of mothers. In an effort to bring about gender equality in both paid employment and unpaid care work, the individualisation of social security rights and tax law in some member states denies benefits derived from spouses for mothers engaging in unpaid care work of family<sup>30</sup>.

In the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*, out of 900 mothers who responded to the section about retirement, 55% say they will depend on the pension of their partners, 49% have a pension of their own, and in addition, 43% have savings. Some also have an investment in housing. In Eastern Europe, 84% rely on pensions and only 16% on savings.

A mother's voice:

- ✓ *"I raised five children, four of whom are now professional engineers and contribute to the payment of pensions and social charges. The cost of raising them and supporting their studies represented true financial sacrifice on the part of their parents, and it is for this reason that I do not have my own home. If my husband dies, I will have only one half of his*

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<sup>30</sup> "The social security and tax system in Sweden, for example, is completely individualised: individual tax assessment and no derived eligibility for social benefits. Denmark has had an almost independent income taxation system for married couples for a long time as well" (MOCHO, 2004: 143; see also COFACE, 2006).

*retirement, and it will never be taken into account that I have raised five children who contribute to the economic growth and wellbeing of my country. I can no longer work."*

For those mothers who depend on the pension of their partners, there is the risk of being left poverty-stricken should the partner disappear. The policy issue of pension credit for time invested in child and family care is an urgent one, to value the mother's investment in human capital, and to provide support for elderly mothers.

Concerning time use, the vast majority of mothers who responded to our survey said that in retirement their time is or will be spent in helping their respective families (81%), with a high of 95% in Italy and low in Spain (59%) and Finland (50%). Other volunteer work will interest 66% of retired/elderly mothers. Other frequent responses include spending time with their families (59%), and leisure and travel. One out of four is studying or would like to continue studying.

*"Citizens in general feel that communities should do more to foster stronger relations between the young and old. Youth should be reminded that the 'current levels of prosperity and welfare are the result of preceding generations' efforts and hardships"* (European Parliament (2008/2118(INI)).

## Chapter 5 – Mothers and Society

### Voluntary Service in the Community

When a woman becomes a mother, her sense of nurturing is developed as she takes care of her child. This nurturance is frequently expressed in dimensions other than mothering. As the child grows, the mother becomes more concerned with the safety in the streets and the civility of the neighbourhood, the quality of the schools and the availability of recreational and cultural opportunities in the community. Mothers tend to join in making life better for others, and in the process they become irreplaceable in their function of shaping the environment outside the family. Mothers are a force for social cohesion in their communities<sup>31</sup>.

Volunteering is usually unseen but nevertheless an important activity in society. In the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*, when asked whether they engage in volunteer service, 54% of respondents answered "yes": 55% of these in non-profit associations, 27 % at school, 16% in the community, and 27 % in other ways, of which half volunteer in their parishes. UK, Sweden, and France have the highest numbers of volunteers with respectively 70%, 67%, and 60%. The satisfaction level of mothers is more likely to increase if they volunteer.

However important this community involvement may be, the most important contribution a mother makes to society is bearing and raising a child to be a productive member of society. We want to stress the fact that raising one's own children is a moral and legal obligation. It is not to be considered the same as a voluntary service.

### Demography

Concern about the declining European birth rate has increased since the Demographic Report of 2006 raised alarm over a growing population imbalance.

In the years following the Second World War, Europe enjoyed peace and prosperity in which there were high birth rates, commonly known as the baby boom. Members of this baby boom first swelled the ranks of the labour force. Now, because of better health and increased longevity, a large generation of "*boomers*" have reached the age where they will start to retire; their need for pensions, health and care services will cause an increase in demand. Since the 1970s, however, the European birth rate began declining, reducing the number of young people entering the labour market at the time when their support is needed to sustain the social benefits for the retiring generation. The ratio of elderly population to those in the work force is projected to rise with each passing year, thus increasing the burden of social expenditure on a decreasing labour force.

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<sup>31</sup> MMM France mothers regularly work with mayors in times of disturbance to calm the troubled youth and to find recreational outlets.

There are short-term and long-term measures to work with the population imbalance, bearing in mind that the short-term measures must not impair the long-term necessities. Both affect mothers and their families.

Proposed short-term measures include increasing the current labour force through immigration, and higher employment rates of the elderly, youth, and women. Immigration can partially supply the need for additional labourers, provided that migrants receive language and vocational training (European Economic and Social Committee, *"The Family and Demographic Change"*, ((Exploratory opinion), SOC/245, 2007)).

Making better use of human resources will help meet this challenge. Since 2000 there has been an increase of 10% in the employment rate of older workers over 60 years of age, thus reversing the trend towards earlier retirement (*The Demography Report*, 2008). Facilitating the employment of young people following education/training is recognised as a current need (European Commission, 2010, *"Youth on the Move"*). Increasing the rate of female employment has been mandated by treaty, (Lisbon Strategy of 2000, and "Europe 2020"<sup>32</sup>) and it also coincides with the desire of many educated women for a career and participation in the paid labour market. What effect will the short-term measure of full-time employment of women have on the long-term necessity of maintaining or increasing the birth-rate?<sup>33</sup>

Ensuring the birth rate is an essential measure, not only for maintaining the population and providing the future labour force, but also because the long-term economic vitality of a society is based on a steady supply of youth<sup>34</sup>. Although Lutz *et al.* in 2002, forecast European population shrinking to low levels from which it would be impossible to recover<sup>35</sup>, more recent population projections from Eurostat predict a more optimistic fertility, which along with migration, would lead to modest population increase by 2060 (European Commission Demography Report, 2008: 7).

In recent years statistics have shown that in the Nordic regions where there are higher rates of women in the paid labour force, the birth rate has also been higher than in regions where mothers remain in the home. This is especially evident when there is government policy support for childcare and paid maternity leave for mothers employed in the work force. Thus based on these statistics, a rationale has been adopted by many policy makers, to encourage women to enter the paid labour force (MoCho, 2004). However, there are many other factors involved which complicate the relationship between maternal employment and birth-rate, including stability of couple relationships, mothers' desires to raise their own children, and ultimately the question of the documented decline in the capability to bear children.

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<sup>32</sup> In European Commission "Europe 2020" women are no longer specifically targeted but are included in the target of 75% of all adults.

<sup>33</sup> For a review of research on reproductive decision-making, please see "European Demographic Research Papers", State-of-the-Art Review as part of a collaborative project "Reproductive decision-making in a macro-micro perspective, determinants of birth rates across the European Union" REPRO, sponsored by the European Commission, <http://www.repro-project.org>.

<sup>34</sup> The economic impact is thoroughly explored in Dent (2009).

<sup>35</sup> "Europe's Population at a Turning Point", press release from the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis Office of Information, 27 March 2003, describing the study of Wolfgang Lutz, Brian C. O'Neill, and Sergei Scherbov).

## Fertility

The fact is that women are having fewer children than previously, and the average age of the mother at first birth has risen from 24.8 years to 27.4 years, and in some countries it is as high as 29 or 30 years. Some women complete their university education, find employment and become established in a career, and then work for a required period of time in order to qualify for maternity leave with salary support. This delay reduces the period of greatest fertility (20-40 years) by a half and leaves only a small period of fertility in the life-course<sup>36</sup>. Often, child-bearing in this period is characterised by complications.

It is well known that “fertility” decreases, starting from the age of 30 in both women<sup>37</sup> and men<sup>38</sup>. For women, ovulation disorders and also some specific health conditions such as the presence of fibroids and systemic diseases, may contribute to infertility.

Studies (Hubinont & Montfort, 2009) suggest that one third of women between 35 and 39 and half of those over age 40 need help for conception<sup>39</sup>. After 35, there is also a greater chance of having “naturally multiple pregnancies”<sup>40</sup>. In addition, the risk of having a baby with birth defects increases with age. The risk of “spontaneous miscarriage” also increases with age, reaching 35% between 40 and 44 and more than 50% after 45. It is caused, at least in part, by increases in chromosomal abnormalities. Women over 35 are more likely to have “abnormal medical conditions” (for example, poorly controlled diabetes or high blood pressure) able to affect pregnancy<sup>41</sup>. Some complications may be more common in women over 35 such as gestational diabetes<sup>42</sup>, pregnancy-induced hypertension or preeclampsia<sup>43</sup>, placenta praevia with risk of severe bleeding during delivery. Caesarean section and premature birth are also more frequent with older women: from 2003 to 2005, 16.6% of women aged 40 and older delivered prematurely compared to 12.5% of women aged 30-39. In 2006, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 47% of pregnancies over 40, had a ‘c-section’ compared to 25 in younger women<sup>15</sup>. In conclusion, these pregnancies in older women carry a significant risk both for the mother and the foetus.

Alternate life-course models could be studied. A different sort of government support was proposed in the initiative by Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, former member of the European

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<sup>36</sup> To overcome the effect of this postponement of childbearing, Sweden offers a “speed premium” which gives special benefits to employed mothers who bear their second child within 30 months of the first birth. This policy has proven to be very effective in the “tempo” or timing of childbearing, whereas work-related policies tend to be more effective in terms of fertility.

<sup>37</sup> Hubinont C. *Le Baby Défi*, ed Anthemis 2009

<sup>38</sup> Dunson, D.B., *et al.* Increased Infertility With Age in Men and Women. *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, vol 103, number 1, January 2004, pages 51-56 AND American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG). Age-Related Fertility Decline. ACOG Committee Opinion, number 413, August 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Fong, S. and McGovern, P. How Does Age Affect Fertility? *Contemporary Ob/Gyn*, April 2004, pages 37-46.

<sup>40</sup> Martin, J. A., *et al.* Births: Final Data for 2006. *National Vital Statistics Report*, volume 57, number 7, January 7, 2009.

<sup>41</sup> Cleary-Goldman, J., *et al.* Impact of Maternal Age on Obstetric Outcome. *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, volume 105, number 5, May 2005, pages 983-990.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph, K.S., *et al.* The Perinatal Effects of Delayed Childbearing. *Obstetrics and Gynecology*, volume 105, number 6, June 2005, pages 1410-1418.

<sup>43</sup> Usta, I.M. and Nassar, A.H. Advanced Maternal Age. Part I: Obstetric Complications. *American Journal of Perinatology*, volume 25, number 8, September 2008, pages 521-534.

Parliament, which called for tax breaks, appropriate housing, sufficient childcare and flexible study conditions for young women and men with family responsibilities. This would encourage childbearing at a younger age as young parents combine their family responsibilities with study<sup>44</sup>.

Valuing families, children's care, parenting and motherhood is essential for our societies. Societal respect is a key factor in the mother's decision to have a child. **If Europe wants more and increasingly capable children, then having children should be valued and the importance of motherhood should be celebrated.**

In the 2010 *Survey of Mothers in Europe*, mothers say that their intense investment in motherhood is not sufficiently valued by society.

Voices of mothers speaking to policymakers:

- ✓ *"Please don't attempt to push women out of the home, either for financial reasons or for societal recognition. Our economy is important, but so much more important is the health - physical, emotional, and spiritual - of our citizens (and the economy and society at large can only benefit from having healthy happy citizens). Women need to hear that giving birth to and nurturing children in their homes is of huge importance to society. This is not the message full-time mothers, or any mothers for that matter, are getting from the political and media world. Many women work because they get great fulfilment from it. This is fantastic, but wouldn't it be great if women could feel the same satisfaction and fulfilment from nurturing a precious human being? Childcare is often seen as menial labour hired out to the lowest bidder. In fact a child's heart and body yearn for a mother's heart and body. We need to stop short-changing our children, and maybe in the process we will discover what gives us the fullest fulfilment!"*
- ✓ *"Don't saw off the branch on which you are seated."*

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<sup>44</sup> European Parliament 2006/2276(INI) "A regulatory framework for measures to reconcile family life and a period of study for young women in the European Union".

## Chapter 6 – Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research

### Recommendations to Policy Makers

Based on the foregoing review of research and a preliminary review of responses to the *2010 Survey of Mothers in Europe* (Annex I), we address these recommendations to policy makers in Europe.

The wellbeing of mothers and fathers and that of their children is intrinsically linked. Because no person or entity is closer or more intensely invested in their children, mothers and fathers should be consulted in the process of evaluating policy consequences.

**⇒ It is important that mothers and fathers are able to create and select conditions that sustain the wellbeing of their family.**

- Parental time spent with children is a non-substitutable form of investment in the future generation. It would not be good to reduce parental effect or substitute for it. Rather policy should support actions that help parents counsel among themselves and that inform and educate parents and potential parents about child development. “The vast majority of parents want to do the best they can for their children, investing time, emotional commitment and money in them” (Chapple & Richardson, 2009).
- Policy can support actions that help couples prepare for the transition to parenthood. Policy can also support actions that acquaint potential parents with their parental responsibilities and raise awareness of the child’s development and needs. Child-centred parenting promotes wellbeing of children.
- Examples of sound practice include the following:
  - MMM promotes “mothers talk to mothers” workshops where the facilitator, a mother herself, seeks not to instruct but to help mothers recognise their many innate skills, share experiences, and build mutual support. Parents themselves are “*experts*” in reference to their own children.
  - The Belgian organisation Gezinsbond sends monthly infant care and parenting tips through the mail to all new parents in Belgium.
  - The European Alliance for Families has begun publishing best practices on its website.

**⇒ It is important to consider the family not only as a collection of individuals but also as society's multi-generational unit.**

- “There is enough evidence to suggest that policy makers should be concerned about the implications of family structure for child wellbeing” (Chapple & Richardson, 2009: 139).
- Raising awareness of the importance of family relationships is a key issue. In general, many surveys show that individuals in stable families show higher life satisfaction. The inverse is also attested by countless international studies



documenting negative effects of family breakdown on the wellbeing of children, parents, communities, and national economies as well<sup>45</sup>.

- For any given number of children, two parent families have a higher economic level. What government policies encourage and provide a framework to encourage two parent families, and what policies discourage them?

**⇒ It is important that parents have both quality and quantity of time to invest in their children.**

- The right to work in paid employment and the right to engage in unpaid care work must both be recognised and supported by policy makers. Because of the diversity of conditions and preferences, and because the needs of children and parents change with time, no 'one size fits all' solution can answer the needs of parents better than policies enabling them to make choices appropriate to their unique goals and changing circumstances. Governments must offer choices about family life depending on their season.
- There must be support for mothers who wish to care for their family full-time:
  - Cash benefits for children, not dependent on parents' work status, could be used to purchase the kind of childcare the parents select such as external day-care solutions, internal in-house services or replacing part of foregone income if parents wish to invest personally in rearing their children at home.
  - Tax systems that allow income splitting and deductions, help parents balance paid employment with unpaid family care.
- Is the full-time dual earner model to be encouraged by the EU during the whole course of family life or can it be acknowledged that there are seasons in the life of families that have to be taken into account?
- There are more women in part-time lower-salaried jobs (as in The Netherlands for example) and in the public sector (as in Sweden). Should policy aim at reversing the proportion of women in part-time jobs or the proportion of women employed in the public sector? Or should policy enhance the likelihood that a mother can choose as a function of her desire to dedicate sufficient time to her family to ensure its wellbeing? Policy makers should be careful not to practice coercive social engineering in the name of gender equality.
- Recognise that employed mothers (full-time or part-time) experience severe problems of childcare during summer holidays.
- Consideration of and inclusion of unpaid care work at home in GDP measurement.
- Unpaid work should rightly be recognised for social security coverage and pension entitlement. If classified as a form of "self employment" a way could be found to include homemakers in the social security and pension programs. These measures would help alleviate the problems of the poverty stricken elderly widow.

**⇒ It is important that policy makers consider the specific seasons of family life where needs, demands and offers vary depending on the age and health of children in the family.**

- Help for mothers to continue education after a break: European governments should facilitate the reinsertion of middle-aged women or men (in their late thirties and early forties) into graduate studies after they have tended to their families and children in their earlier years. State Universities should be mandated to take up such older students, who, being in the prime of their life and having put behind them the time-

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<sup>45</sup> Recent reviews include Roberts *et al* (2009) and Family Watch Annual Report (2009).

- consuming child rearing years, can devote their energy and free time to earning a degree. Corporations, through tax incentives, should be encouraged to hire such older graduates: they surely represent a very dependable, mature labour force with valuable experience in management for growth.
- Help mothers return to work after they rear their children. Research seems to indicate that children - hence society at large - largely benefit from a "stay at home" parent who directly invests in children's development. Our society should assist and help these parents. This could be done through household tax relief. Also parents would more readily make such a decision if they knew that subsequently, when their children mature and become self sufficient, they could earn a degree and easily join the work force. Corporations on the other hand, would be reassured that their labour force would be dependable for the long term, without the constant interruption of parental leaves or "personal days" taken to tend to urgent family matters such as child medical visits, school meetings, etc.
    - Leverage FAMCOMPASS project in order to give confidence to mothers that their unpaid work at home can be valued and evaluated as a competency for the labour market. In the near future, skills and competences obtained in family life will be in greater demand considering the growing need for physical, as well as social and educational care. With a shrinking labour market supply and pressure for longer careers, it becomes very important that the quality of the skills and competences men and women have obtained in family life, in their roles as educators, homemakers and care workers, can be validated<sup>46</sup>.

## Suggestions for Future Research

### Related to Mothers

The fact that Eurostat can give no accurate count of mothers is an example of the degree to which mothers are taken seriously in government policy. The same may be said for fathers. If mothers are not identifiable how can they be addressed? How can they be given a voice? Yet mothers' function is of unavoidable and indisputable importance. Mothers are the force that produces the continual regeneration of society. Society's improvement or decline depends more on the decisions and behaviour of its mothers and its fathers in both quantitative and qualitative ways, than on the actions of any other segment of society. It is not enough to base policy thinking and policy dialogue on broad categories such as "adults and children" only, or "women, men and children". As a mothers says in the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*:

- ✓ *"In current research the role of mother is not well understood. Researchers who are not parents will not be able to understand and agree on the nature of the role."*

### Related to Childbearing:

- How can government policies help provide the framework for couples to have the number of children they desire at a younger age?

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<sup>46</sup> "Family Competences Portfolio: Developing an instrument for the assessment of family related skills and competences," <http://www.famcompus.eu>.

**Related to Childcare:**

- What are the consequences on child development of leave policies for mothers or fathers during first years of life?
- What features of leave matter the most to parents? To the welfare of the children affected?
- Multi-disciplinary research as to what makes a “high-quality” pre-school program?
- Multi-disciplinary research, including Neurobiology/Neuropsychiatry, as to what is the effect of long-term ‘out-of-home’ care on infant and on pre-school child?
- Multidisciplinary research to better understand the reasons for the low morale of young people.
- Multi-disciplinary research, including Medicine and Epidemiology, on physical health of European youngsters who show increasing obesity and diabetes mellitus, and declining motor skills. This perspective has implications for families in terms of family relations, family management, fitness for work, care systems of all sorts.
- Children’s perceptions of parenthood, children’s perceptions of their care arrangement

**Related to Gender Equality:**

- With changing attitudes towards fatherhood and men's work in the family, multidisciplinary research is needed to understand how men and women adapt after becoming parents and how to help new parents in this transition.
- Multidisciplinary research needs to study the reasons for higher gender segregation and salary differential in countries having higher numbers of women in employment, which is contrary to the expectation of policy favouring the dual-earner model.
- Multidisciplinary research is needed on the effect of policies generated by equality measures to be sure they are not counterproductive.

**Related to Life-Course and Family Structure:**

- More research on how parental needs vary across their life-course and as a function of family situation.
- Study possibilities of alternative life-course patterns.
- What are the consequences on children and parents of high stress levels in dual earner families?
- What kinds of strain breaks couple relationships? How can couples be supported in their life together?
- The longitudinal impact of family structure on child outcomes: health, school performance, social and work skills, future family formation, and parenting behaviour in their own turn.
- At what age, in what context, and by whom should knowledge-based information about child and adult development and relationships be transmitted to people?
- How can media be used for displaying constructive information about family?

**Related to State Policies:**

- More research on taxation policy, transfers and benefits policies and effects on family.
- The unintended consequences of government policy decisions on families, children, and elderly mothers.
- Interdisciplinary study of the assumptions concerning the future nature and organisation of work and the pressure on Europe’s labour force due to competitive

global markets as they will impact the essential contribution of families to the sustainability of European society.

## ANNEX I: THE VOICE OF MOTHERS IN EUROPE

### Preliminary Review of the 2010 *Survey of Mothers in Europe*

#### Background/Introduction

The European delegation of the Mouvement Mondial des Mères (World Movement of Mothers Europe or MMMEurope) was invited by the European Commission to be part of a newly created FAMILY PLATFORM. MMMEurope is to represent the interests and realities of Europe's mothers. The Family Platform is charged to evaluate current knowledge and to recommend research directions to support future evidence-based family policy development in the European Union. MMMEurope has launched the "*Survey of Mothers in Europe*" in order to gather information on the challenges, priorities and wishes of mothers with regard to their wellbeing and that of their family.

- MMMEurope seeks to **give voice** to the concerns of Europe's mothers, accurately reflecting their opinions and their realities. The aim is not to speak ABOUT them but to make THEIR VOICE heard in policy circles.
- A secondary objective is to maintain an **on-going dialogue** with these mothers to the extent that mothers perceive our questions as a way of expressing what THEY are concerned about.
- Finally, to identify and give primacy to the **strong commonalities** that cut across cultural, linguistic, political, economic, and social classifications

#### Methodology

The "*Survey of Mothers in Europe*" was launched on February 1, 2010 by MMM Europe. The survey is conducted online: [www.mmmeurope.org/survey](http://www.mmmeurope.org/survey). It is directed to mothers living in Member States of the European Union. The survey seeks to identify their realities and to record their opinions, concerns, and priorities with regard to key life issues. The survey also asks mothers to draft messages to European policy makers in their own terms and to participate in subsequent dialogue with MMMEurope. Rarely are mothers recognised as specific and distinct participants with a special role and identity. Even more rarely are they given the opportunity to speak with their own voice.

#### Respondents

Respondents are self-selected, having learned of the survey through word-of-mouth, email, and links on the websites of affiliates of MMM or other civil society associations<sup>47</sup> serving mothers and families in Europe. This type of sample has been referred to by various descriptive names such as "snowball sample", "affinity sample" or "network sample". The sample is therefore made up of persons that recruit each other to take the survey. Thus an important feature of survey participants is that they are probably linked together, many of them in already constituted information- and/or action-related networks. More important in assessing the nature of the sample is the profile they reveal through their answers to questions. Here are some key features of this profile:

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<sup>47</sup> See Annex for list of associations across Europe who have helped in disseminating the survey.

- Besides being a woman, each respondent is also a mother who seems to give high significance to her identity as a mother.
- These respondents are also characterised by ability and motivation to keep informed on matters concerning motherhood and family.
- These respondents are people that desire to make their thoughts known, and they have been willing to seek out the link that would permit them to do so.
- A feature of their motivation is that they were told that this survey would give them an opportunity to compose a personal message to European policy makers<sup>48</sup>.
- Respondents know how to use a computer, and communicate widely through the internet<sup>49</sup>.

### Languages

The *Survey of Mothers in Europe* was launched in the following 10 languages: German, English, French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian, Hungarian, Swedish, Slovak (added on March 25, 2010) and Finnish (added in April 2010). It is addressed to mothers in 16 countries (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, The Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Sweden, Finland, UK, Ireland, Malta, and Slovakia). Translation has been done by nine volunteers in each of their mother tongue in dialogue with MMMEurope staff in Brussels.

### Survey Tool

The survey tool being used is graciously provided by [www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com), a leading market research tool that is used by Fortune 500 companies in the US and universities worldwide.

### Categories of questions

The survey contains questions in the following areas:

- Family background: Variables include age; family type; age, number and residence of children.
- Socio-demographic background: Variables include age, educational attainment, employment, affiliation, voluntary activity, religious commitment, migration background, residence location
- Satisfaction as a Mother: Variables include satisfaction and contributing factors.
- Opinions on family issues: Degree of agreement or disagreement with common statements about mothers and family.
- Time use: Variables include theoretical preference for employment v. family care, actual situation, satisfaction with time use.
- Retirement: Variables include plans, concerns, envisioned time use, housing, financial preparation.
- Intergenerational and social networks of support: Variables explore family and other sources of social and material support.
- Family Relationships: Variables include causes of family difficulty, relationships with children and partner, factors important in determining the quality of child and partner relationships.

Open-ended statements were solicited on the following topics:

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<sup>48</sup> This relates to the many thank you messages that the respondents left behind in the “comments” section at the end of the survey.

<sup>49</sup> Average internet penetration in EU is 65.3% according to Internet World Stats 2010.

- “If you were talking to a woman who is pregnant with her first child, how would describe what it is like to **transition** into being a mother?”
- “If you could launch a **message to the political world** in order to increase the family’s wellbeing, what would it be?”
- Of those reporting dissatisfaction with current work schedule: “Please explain why you are unsatisfied about your **current work schedule**.”
- Other: Twelve additional questions include a final category termed “other” or “other, please explain”.

#### Date range:

The analysis includes responses that were delivered between February 1, 2010 and June 17, 2010. The majority of the responses were provided during the first month the survey ran. MMMEurope decided to keep the survey running to increase the response level in Germany which had a very low number of respondents at the time this analysis was done.

## Results Overview

When this survey was launched, MMMEurope hoped that mothers would respond and voice their opinions, but expectations were far outreached when thousands of mothers started to respond within the first weeks of the launch. We, at MMMEurope, through our assigned task in the Family Platform, take our role of voicing their opinions very seriously and have tried to report their messages as truthfully and thoroughly as possible. Given the survey is still running, the following analysis focuses mainly on quantitative data gathered between February 1 through June 17, except for the policy messages that were analysed in detail. Please note, it is therefore still considered as a preliminary analysis.

### 1. Profile of surveyed mothers

Besides their opinion, mother’s responses to the survey questions also provide knowledge about who they are: the general profile is a mother with a certain maturity (average 37 years old), a high level of education (99% secondary or higher education), married or living in couple (86%), with 2.6 children, working full-time or part-time and a propensity to offer volunteer service (54%). This leads to suggest that this panel is **a sample of active, politically concerned mothers**.

The tables below provide a profile of survey respondents and in some cases compares the respondent profile with that of the Eurofound sample of adult women described on page 7.

MMM Survey of Mothers in Europe 2010 9472 respondents		Eurofound Women interviewed in 2007* 20200 respondents	
Mothers by number of children			Women by number of children*
0	0	24%	0
1	23%	19%	1
2	32%	34%	2
3	23%	14%	3
4	13%	5%	4
5 or more	9%	4%	5 or more

MMM Survey of Mothers in Europe 2010 9472 respondents		Eurofound Women interviewed in 2007* 20200 respondents	
Age of mothers			Age of women interviewed
18 or less	0%		
19-25	1%	12%	18-24
26-40	52%	18%	25-34
41-55	36%	27%	35-49
56-70	10%	22%	50-64
71 or more	1%	22%	65 or more
Mothers by couple relations			Women by couple relations
Married or living with partner (includes 2% remarried)	87%	64%	Married or living with partner (includes 2% remarried)
Separated or divorced	8%	7%	Separated or divorced
Single (never married and do not live with partner)	3%	16%	Single (never married and do not live with partner)
Widowed	2%	13%	Widowed
Mothers by employment <sup>50</sup>			Women by employment
Work as employee, or employer/self- employed	51%	38%	Work as employee, or employer/self-employed
Employed but on leave for child-care or other cause	8%	2%	Employed but on leave for child- care or other cause
Retired	4%	24%	Retired
Full-time homemaker	23%	20%	Full-time homemaker
Unemployed	3%	5%	Unemployed
Other <sup>51</sup>	11%	10%	Other <sup>49</sup>
Mothers by highest education completed			Women by highest education completed
Primary	1%	19%	Primary or less
Secondary	12%	56%	Secondary
Post-secondary	36%	7%	Post-secondary
University and more	51%	18%	University and more
Mothers by voluntary service			Women by voluntary service
Yes	55%	24%	Yes
No	45%	76%	No
Those who volunteer do so in the following areas:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 55% in non-profit associations</li> <li>• 27% at school</li> <li>• 16% in community aid</li> <li>• 27% in other ways, of which half volunteer in their parishes</li> </ul>			

<sup>50</sup> For reference, another question later in the survey also asked about their current time use: 29% work full-time, 32% work part-time, 6% look for a job, and 32% are full-time stay-at-home mothers. If you add up the categories “maternity leave”, “retired”, parts of “other”, one get to about 32% full-time stay-at-home which equals the 32% of the other question.

<sup>51</sup> Survey: Category labeled “other” was undefined but includes the public sector, liberal professions, teachers, artisans, assisting spouse, etc. Eurofound: category labeled “other” includes the following categories: In education 1%, other 2%, at work as relative assisting on family farm 1%, unable to work due to illness 2%

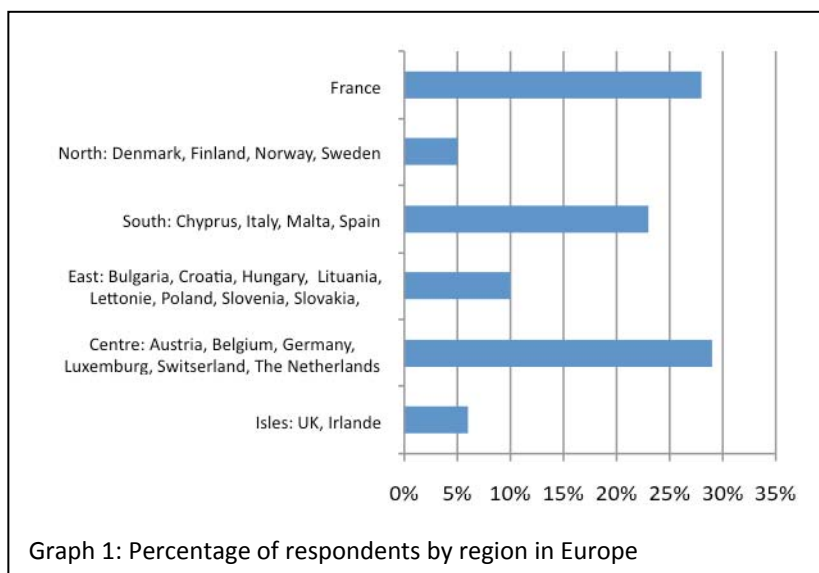


MMM Survey of Mothers in Europe 2010 9472 respondents		Eurofound Women interviewed in 2007* 20200 respondents	
Mothers migration background <sup>52</sup>			Women migration background
Yes	11%	11%	
No	89%	89%	
Mothers by area of residence			
City	57%	-	
Countryside	25%	-	
Suburbs	18%	-	

\*Source: Courtesy of Eurofound. This Profile of European Women was drawn from unweighted responses to questions posed in face-to-face interviews. Between 499 and 850 women were interviewed in each country during 2007.

Mothers by country	Number of respondents	Percent of respondents
France	2035	29%
Belgium	1493	21%
Spain	1226	17%
Hungary	580	8%
UK	368	5%
Italy	395	6%
Sweden	227	3%
Luxemburg	201	3%
Finland	102	1%
Slovakia	92	1%
The Netherlands	71	1%
Switzerland	52	1%
Ireland	45	1%

To ease the preliminary analysis, we grouped the countries by region based on proximity, as follows:



<sup>52</sup> In the survey, we asked if at least one family member is issued from migration (including father and/or mother and/or grand-parents). Eurofound looks at parents only.

## 2. Motherhood – open questions

As part of the survey, mothers were asked the following question: *“If you were talking to a woman who is pregnant with her first child, how would you describe what it's like to transition into being a mother?”* This question received a response from more than 7000 mothers. Responses contain much strong emotion and manifest the irreversible transformation of priorities and concerns that characterise motherhood. The main thrust of these messages is captured in Chapter 1 of “Realities of Mothers in Europe” report. To do full justice to these messages will require considerable additional effort and the use of sophisticated analytical tools.

## 3. Wellbeing satisfaction level as a mother

- Out of the 7883 respondents to the questions on satisfaction, 93% say they are satisfied as a mother, with only 1% reporting they are completely unsatisfied.
  - Eastern countries show the highest degree of dissatisfaction among mothers with more than 10%
  - Luxemburg and Sweden show the lowest degrees of dissatisfaction with less than 3%
  - Among the 500 unsatisfied mothers, nearly half report experiencing a difficult or very difficult family situation and are unsatisfied with their current time use.
  - As seen on the chart below (Table 2), the marital status has some impact on the satisfaction of mothers. Mothers who are in a partner relationship are more likely to be satisfied than single, divorced or separated mothers.

		What situation best describes you?							Total
		Married	Single	Divorced	Separated	Remarried	Live in couple	Widower	
In general, how satisfied are you of your current life as a mother?	Very satisfied	2701 38%	74 27%	131 25%	74 22%	45 27%	341 33%	59 33%	3398 34%
	Satisfied	2818 39%	99 35%	203 39%	144 43%	89 54%	424 42%	68 38%	3807 38%
	Not very satisfied	268 4%	29 10%	43 8%	30 9%	10 6%	43 4%	9 5%	445 4%
	Very unsatisfied	26 0%	8 3%	14 3%	7 2%	2 1%	10 1%	0 0%	66 0%
	Total	7190 100%	279 100%	514 100%	336 100%	166 100%	1018 100%	181 100%	10000 100%

		What best describes your current employment status?									Total
		Employee	Manager	Worker	Unemploy ed	Self- employed	Full-time mother	On parental/ maternity leave	Retired	Other	
In general, how satisfied are you of your current life as a mother?	Very satisfied	762 37%	345 37%	26 32%	79 37%	328 44%	891 54%	288 48%	142 51%	427 46%	3398 34%
	Satisfied	1093 53%	525 56%	46 56%	101 47%	380 50%	681 41%	299 50%	117 42%	444 47%	3807 38%
	Not very satisfied	159 8%	57 6%	8 10%	24 11%	36 5%	65 4%	15 2%	16 6%	49 5%	445 4%
	Very unsatisfied	18 0%	9 1%	1 1%	8 4%	6 0%	7 0%	2 0%	4 1%	9 1%	66 0%
	Total	2046 100%	941 100%	82 100%	213 100%	753 100%	1652 100%	604 100%	281 100%	935 100%	10000 100%

Table 3: Cross-tabulation between satisfaction and employment status

		In reality, what is your daily life schedule like?				Total
		I have a paid full-time job	I have a paid part-time job	I take care of my family full-time	I am looking for a job	
In general, how satisfied are you of your current life as a mother?	Very satisfied	690 28%	948 35%	1138 43%	158 29%	3398 34%
	Satisfied	1101 45%	1180 44%	938 35%	225 42%	3807 38%
	Not very satisfied	172 7%	107 4%	77 3%	35 6%	445 4%
	Very unsatisfied	21 0%	15 0%	11 0%	7 1%	66 0%
	Total	2473 100%	2681 100%	2644 100%	542 100%	10000 100%

Table 4: Cross-tabulation between satisfaction and time use

- As seen on the two charts above (Table 3 and 4), there is also a slight difference in satisfaction among respondents depending on the employment status. Mothers on maternity leave/parental leave and stay-at-home moms are more likely to be satisfied than others, followed closely by self-employed respondents. Those working full-time seem less satisfied than those working part-time.
- The chart below (Table 5) confirms that there is a strong correlation between general satisfaction and satisfaction level of the panel's time-use.

		How do you rate your current work schedule?				
		Very satisfied	Satisfied	Not very satisfied	Very unsatisfied	Total
In general, how satisfied are you of your current life as a mother?	Very satisfied	1333 54%	1278 30%	261 19%	47 18%	3398 34%
	Satisfied	645 26%	2009 47%	689 50%	90 35%	3807 38%
	Not very satisfied	39 2%	163 4%	135 10%	50 19%	445 4%
	Very unsatisfied	9 0%	20 0%	15 1%	10 4%	66 0%
	Total	2447 100%	4232 100%	1365 100%	258 100%	10000 100%

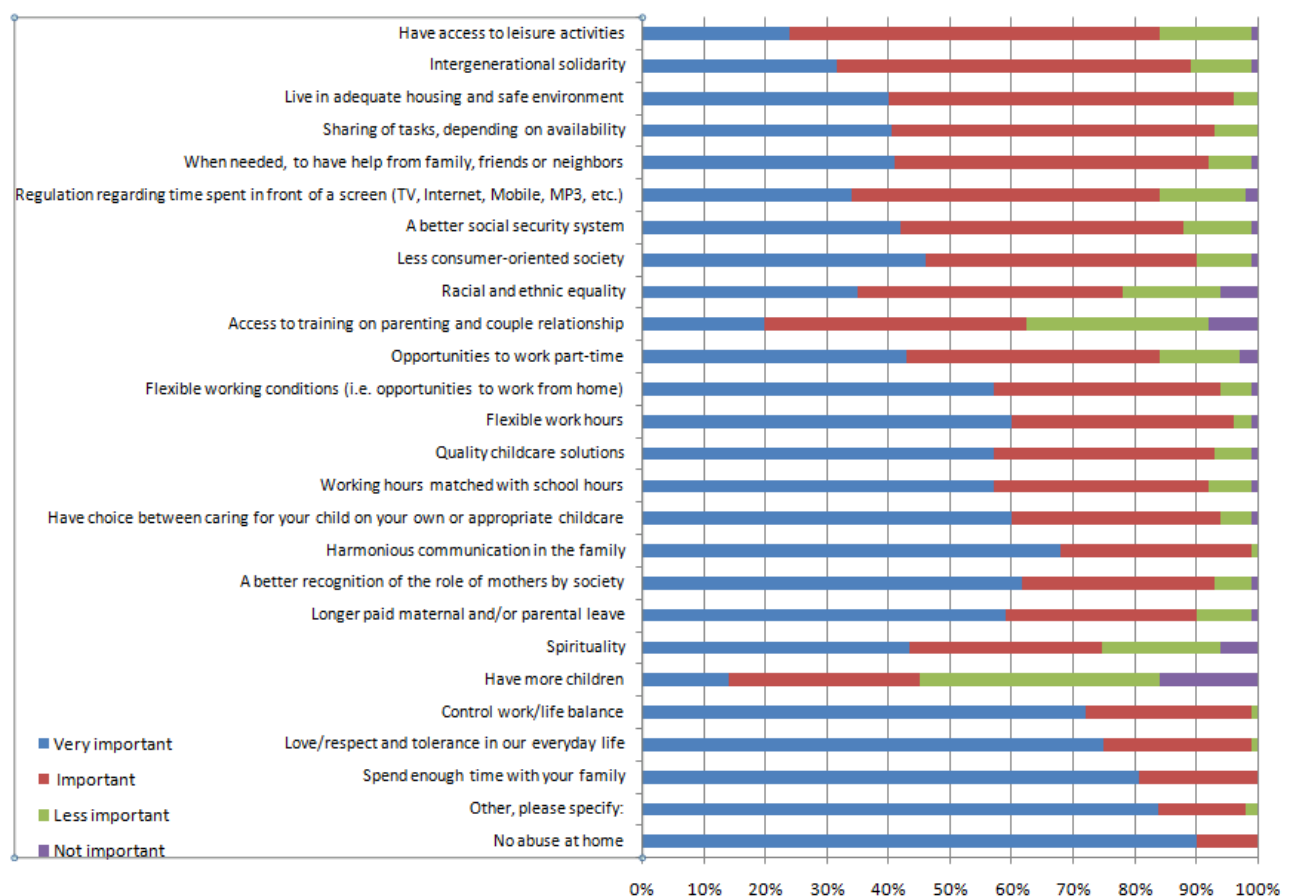
Table 5: Cross-tabulation between satisfaction as a mother and satisfaction of time use

- When asked to vote on a list of factors (see table 6 below) that could contribute to improving the wellbeing of mothers, all respondents said it is very important not to “have violence in the family” (90%). Closely following in frequency of mention were “having enough time with their family” (80%), “more love, respect and tolerance” (75%), then “Work/life balance” (72%) and “harmonious communication in the family” (68%).
  - The “time issue” is considered as particularly very important for mothers with young children in the household.
- “Having enough leisure activities”, “More intergenerational solidarity” and “living in an adequate and safe housing” were considered the top three important categories to them.
- The three least-ranked factors on the list were “having more children”, “having access to couple-life and parenthood training courses” and “spirituality”.
- Nearly 500 open responses were solicited in the “other” category, for example:
  - ✓ *“The state should take responsibility and offer quality childcare and understand that if they want women in the labor market they should take this seriously. It's for the sake of all society not of just the women.”*
  - ✓ *“Recognition of stay-at-home mothers. I am convinced that society would be more peaceful if families were motivated to take care themselves of their children. Even, if a training is sometimes very helpful. Furthermore, working hours matching schoolhours would allow many women not to be in front of a dilemma: the children or work. Both are rewarding and contribute to women's wellbeing. A happy woman will be more available for her children and receptive to their needs, including to their limits.”*
  - ✓ *“Recognition and acknowledgement of the inestimable value of the mother to the family and society”*
  - ✓ *«Mothers are generally excellent time managers in the sense that they can't stay in endless meetings. Therefore, they become efficient co-workers. This skill needs to be better recognised and should allow companies to hire more women during schoolhours schedules only. I believe a lot in corporate daycares that enable a proximity of the mother OR the father with his/her small child. There should be a better recognition that the childrearing-related professions are highly qualified jobs in terms of human relations and education and that they should be more strictly controlled and better paid, not*

based on diplomas, but rather on the capacity to take care of fragile beings who act like 'sponges'."

- ✓ « A better recognition of the mother's AND father's role at work. If the father is recognised, it will be more the less easier for the mother. One have to concentrate on both. The parental leave is taken too little by men because it is not well perceived. If it was more taken by more men, it would be better perceived for the women too...."
- ✓ "Longer paternity leaves"
- ✓ "Reduction in typical adult full time hours to reduce absent father syndrome and make more part time opportunities available for other parents"
- ✓ "REAL opportunities to choose between stay-at-home motherhood and paid work"
- ✓ "A family friendly society..."

**Table 6: Q: Please indicate which factors are most important in contributing to the wellbeing of mothers in general and their families. Family and work-related factors are included.**



N = 6902 lowest and 7865 highest

#### 4. Family relationships

##### In general

- Some 89% of respondents rate their relations within the family as good or very good.
- Eight hundred sixty three (or 11 %) report a difficult or very difficult family situation

- Those expressing difficult or very difficult family situations were asked<sup>53</sup> to identify contributing factors from a list of eight items. An open response option was also provided. Highest rated factors from the list were separation/divorce (22%), loneliness (16%), and depression (13%). A striking 48% wrote in factors not on the list provided. These open responses are often very poignant, and will be studied at a later time.

#### Relationship with children

- When asked more specifically about relationships with their children, 97% reported good to very good relationships.
- Respondents were also asked to rate the importance of relations with children in a list of nine factors. Additional factors could be volunteered through an open response question for which results are yet to be analysed.
  - Rated as “very important” were “having stable and harmonious relationships within the family” (88%), followed by “having sufficient time to spend with them” (84%) and “being able to set and maintain boundaries and limits.” (73%)
  - Finance and adequate lodging came rated as the top “important” factors.
  - The factors that were ranked as not important or not at all important are “influence of the media and time spent in front of a screen (TV, Internet, GSM, MP3)” as well as “influence of my child(ren)’s friends”
  - Some 993 respondents also added their reasons in the “other” category. Here are some examples that show the wide range of factors mothers believe are important for their relationship with their children:
    - ✓ „Mutual trust“
    - ✓ “Maintain a dialogue”
    - ✓ “Balanced diet”
    - ✓ “Be able to financially support their scholar education”
    - ✓ “Not to be too tired”
    - ✓ „Stable couple“
    - ✓ “Love”
    - ✓ “Respect, affection, moderation”

#### Relationship with partner<sup>54</sup>

- With reference to partner relationships, respondents rated their relationship from very good to very difficult, after which they were asked to rate from “very important” to “unimportant” a list of ten factors followed by an open-response option yet to be studied.
  - Some 91% reported a “good” or “very good” relationship, with 56% very good.
  - The most frequently selected very important factor is “Respect, love and tolerance” (92%). This was followed by “share same values” (70%) and “being in agreement/disagreement on how to rear children” (65%)
  - The factors reported as important are “financial situation” (65%), “relationship with your extended family (parents, brothers/sisters, etc)” (57%), and “quality of your sexual relations” (57%), and “sharing of tasks, depending on availability” (50%)

<sup>53</sup> This section was started later and several choices were made possible only after the week beginning March 22, 2010.

<sup>54</sup> Question on quality of relationship with partner asked only if respondents had stated earlier if they are married, in couple, or remarried.

- The least important factor is “Regulation of time spent in front of a screen (TV, Internet, GSM, etc)”
- Here again, a little more than 800 respondents have used the open-ended space to give their own opinion on important factors related to their partner relationship: The two main topics that came back often are trust and dialogue/communication, like these examples:
  - ✓ *“Maintaining a dialogue increases the relationship even if we don’t share the same opinions; it’s important to be able to say how we feel about each other, even what we don’t like about each other. It downplays the situation to put words on problems.»*
  - ✓ *“Respect for each other, understanding and acceptance of each other’s different backgrounds”*
  - ✓ *“Trust”*

## 5. Opinion of mothers

Mothers were asked to agree or disagree with seventeen statements of opinion, a sample of which is given in the table below. Highlights include the following examples of strongly shared opinions:

1. 99% agree that “Healthy and good relationships within the family promote the emotional health of family members”.
2. 97% agree that “Policy makers should always consider the impact on families when preparing government policies”.
3. 95% agree that “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. (Article 16, Universal Declaration of Human Rights)”
4. 95% agree with the statement that “The service mothers perform for their children should be recognised as important work”.
5. 91% agree with the statement “A mother’s influence goes far beyond the home and contributes to the cultural, economic, and social development of her country.” (Ban Ki Moon, May 2009)
6. Opinions differ widely on the statements that “Mothers would have more children if they did not have to work” or “if they had access to better childcare solutions”.
7. 83% of mothers reject the statement that “Teenagers can take care of themselves after school”.
8. 64% of mothers in the panel do not agree with the statement that “Motherhood is well recognised and valued by society”.
9. 64% reject the statement that “Mothers find remunerated employment to be more satisfying than the upbringing of children”.

## 6. Retirement

- Nearly 900 mothers have responded to this section, which corresponds to the mothers who did not have their children under the same roof anymore.

- About plans for retirement: 64% rely on their pension, 46% on their savings, 31% on their housing investment, one fourth have private pension plans and 15% chose the “other plans” category.
  - The eastern countries showed a slightly different set of responses with 84% relying on their pension and only 16% on their savings.
- Their main worries are by far health-related (59%), followed by financial with 36%. About 10% have written that they do not have ANY worry in the “other” category.
  - In the eastern countries, financial worries are number one before health problems.
- Relative to time use, the vast majority of the respondents have said that in their retirement their time is or will be spent in helping their respective families (81%), volunteering (66%). Other frequent responses include spending time with their families (59%), and leisure and travel. One out of four is or would like to continue studying.
  - Compared to all other countries, especially with Italy (95%), Finland and Spain ranked low in willingness to “Help their respective families” (50% and 59%)
- With regards to the financial resources of those who are or will retire, 55% depend on the pension of their partners, 49% have a pension of their own and 43% depend on their savings.
  - Here again, there is a significant difference with the eastern countries.
- Regarding lodging during retirement, the vast majority (73%) want to keep their own house or other independent housing as long as possible. The second choice (39%) was “if I am/become infirm or unable to care for myself, I am/will go to a retirement facility because I do not want to become a burden on my children”. Only 3% live or would like to live with one of their children (except the Eastern region with 7%).

## 7. Intergenerational and social networks of support

- Of the 5,574 mothers who have responded to this section, 70% can count on their partner to look after their children either regularly or occasionally.
- 57% of respondents say that their parents help them tend their children, for the most part on an occasional basis.
- The situation is similar when there is a sick child.
- For some household tasks 50% are helped regularly by their spouses, 45% occasionally, and 5% never.
- More than 80% report that their spouse regularly helps out and boosts their morale. Only 5% receive no moral support.
- Parents, other members of their family, and friends also play an occasional role in providing moral support and keeping company.
- In reference to finances, 4/5th of respondents depend on the regular financial support of their spouse.
- Some 34% receive occasional financial support from their parents.
- As to transportation, in 45% of cases, it is the spouse that helps on a regular basis, while friends help only occasionally.
- One out of two mothers in this panel uses external day care or nursery services on a regular basis, while 14% do so only occasionally.
- One out of 5 mothers in this panel use regular home services (nanny, cleaning lady).



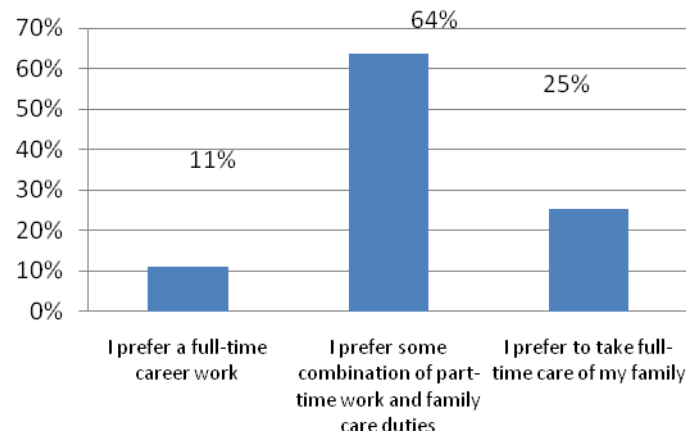
- As to rendering service outside the home, nearly half of the mothers reported offering regular or occasional service to other members of their family, to friends, and to neighbors.

## 8. Time use of mothers

This section treats in more depth on the work/family topic. Mothers in the survey were asked what their wishes or preferences, reality and satisfaction level is in terms of their personal time use.

Preference: Respondents were asked to express their theoretical preferences with regard to paid work (full-time or part-time) versus full-time attention to family.

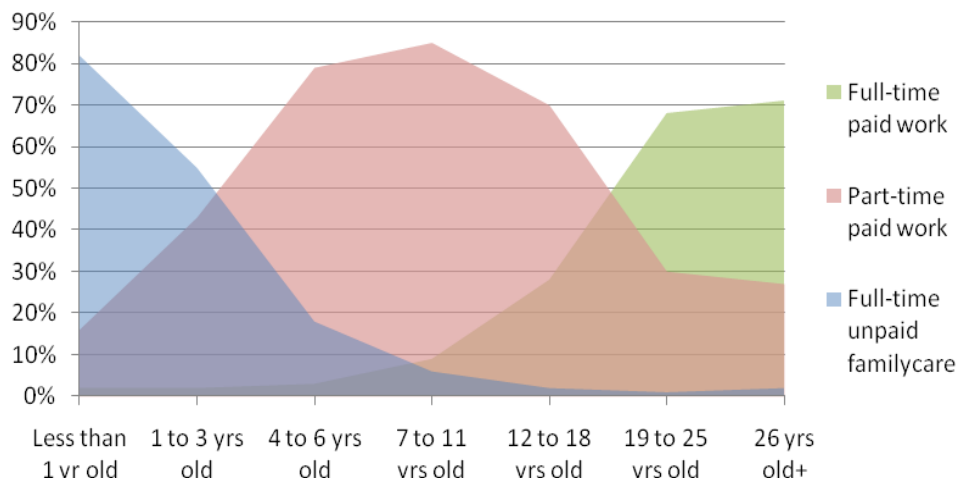
**Graph 7. Q. Surveys\* have asked women their preferences concerning paid work. About 20% choose to center their lives on a career, about 60% would like to combine paid work with family care duties, and about 20% would prefer to center their lives on full-time unpaid family care duties. What would be your preference? (\*Dr Catherine Hakim....)**



N = 8720, one possible answer

- As seen in the graph 7 above, 11% have a preference for a full-time career work, 65% prefer some combination of part-time work and family care duties, and 26% prefer to take full-time care of their family.
- For the ones who have chosen a combination of part-time paid work and care for their family, they were asked to express their preference as a function of the age of their children. There is a strong commonality across the European respondents on this question. As seen on the chart above (graph 8), there is a definite correlation between the age of the children and the amount of time desired to take care of them. There is a clear preference for full-time family care when the child is between 0 and 3. After that, the preference becomes a part-time paid work. The turning point to full-time paid work is when the child is 18+.

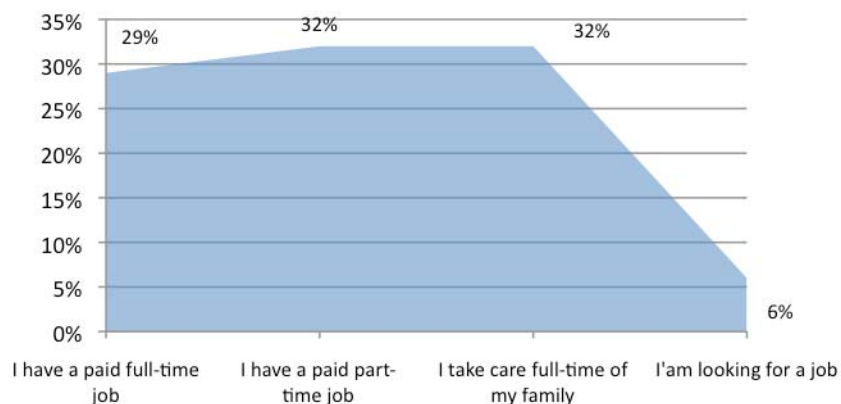
**Graph 8. Q. You have selected a combination of part-time work and family care duties. If you had the choice, which option would you choose depending on the children's age periods below:**



N= 4744 only if responded combination of paid and unpaid family work

Reality versus preference: After asking respondents to express their preferences as to the use of their time, they were asked how their time was actually allocated between the three options mentioned. The proportion is about 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 with 6% looking for a job.

**Graph 9. Q: And, in reality, what is your daily life schedule like?**



N=8504, one possible answer

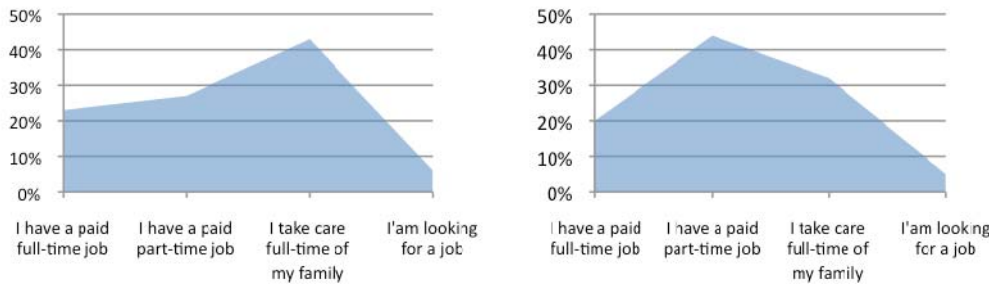
- On a regional and country-level, we see that the curves vary a lot. Hungary and Finland have a similar curve with a high proportion of mothers working full-time (47% and 42% respectively). However we saw that their satisfaction level is very different.
- UK and France show the highest percent of “stay-at-home” mothers with 43% and 41%; the lowest percent is in Italy and Spain with 20% and 22%.
- Finally, Belgium has the highest degree of part-time workers with 43%.
- The highest percentages of mothers looking for a job are in Hungary, Spain and Italy.

**Graph 10. Q: And, in reality, what is your daily life schedule like?**



**N=523 live in Hungary**

**N = 1153 live in Spain**



**N=1960 live in France**

**N = 212 live in Sweden**

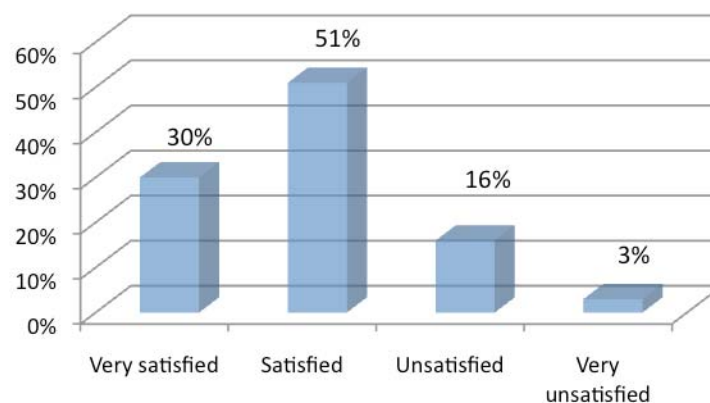
Satisfaction with time use: Finally, it looks like 4 out 5 mothers are very or quite satisfied with their current work/life balance in their lives? 3% said they were “not at all satisfied”

On a regional-level, the Nordic countries show a 45% of very satisfied mothers. See graph 10 to view actual time use.

- On the contrary, in the Southern and Eastern regions, more than 25% of mothers reported dissatisfaction with their current time use of our respondents. In Hungary, 10% are very dissatisfied.

To understand reasons for dissatisfaction, three weeks after the start of data collection, an open response question was placed in the survey questionnaire. Those who expressed lack of satisfaction were asked to explain why they were not satisfied with their current work schedule. Responses will be analysed in final report.

**Graph 11. Q: How do you rate your current work schedule?**



N=8504, one possible answer

## 9. Key policy messages

### When mothers are given a voice, what will they say to policymakers?

At the end of the survey, a significant open question asked what message the respondent would like to send to policy makers. Over 6500 (6579) mothers responded, many at great length and with evident emotion. Clearly, mothers were motivated by the opportunity to send a message which they hoped would be heard.

#### Methodology:

A total of 4306 comments entered were treated by a group of in-country volunteers who read the comments written in their mother tongue. They then analysed and classified each comment using a same classification grid across all countries. (Please note that a comment made by a mother can include several political messages and have been classified as such.) The classification grid includes 12 macro-categories and 46 micro-categories, which objective is to help quantify the type of messages that were received. The volunteers were also asked to choose some of the most representative and relevant messages per category and translated them to English. The messages were analysed for the following countries: Belgium (1002), Finland (80), France (639), Hungary (458), Italy (355), Slovakia (90), Spain (1130), Sweden (213), and UK (339).

#### Trends:

As shown by table 12 below, that summarises the messages coded by category, the most recurring message is related to work/life balance.

About one third (32%) of the comments left by the respondent mothers contained a message about **work/family life balance**. The second third is related to **“Support of stay-at-home**

Table 12: Macro-categories of political messages brought forward by respondents to European policy makers

CATEGORY	# of mentions	%
WORK/FAMILY LIFE BALANCE	2224	32%
SUPPORT STAY-AT-HOME PARENTS*	884	13%
FINANCIAL SUPPORT*	829	12%
SUPPORT FAMILIES	700	10%
CHOICE*	674	10%
MISCELLANEOUS	484	7%
VALUES/RESPONSIBILITY	267	4%
SUPPORT PARENTS	265	4%
RELATIONSHIP	249	4%
EDUCATION – SCHOOLS	153	2%
GENDER EQUALITY	152	2%
DIVERSITY	24	0%

\*The **“Support Stay-at-home parents”** represents actually 30% if you include the **“Choice”** category that mainly consists of the possibility of choice for childcare before school and make it financially possible that parents take care of their children. Half of the **“Financial Support”** category consists of having an allocation/pension for stay-at-home mother/father.

**parents/Choice”<sup>55</sup> (30%).** The last third consists of **“Support of families/parents”** (15%) and less recurring topics (less than 5% each) related to **“Relationships”, “Education/schools”, “Gender equality”** and **“Diversity”**.

Please note that many of the hereby categories do overlap. Consequently, this table serves as a reference only.

On a country-level, we see that **work/family life balance** is an especially important claim among our Spanish (52%) and Hungarian respondents (40%). It does remain the number one claim in Italy (33%), Belgium (28%), and France (27%).

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<sup>55</sup> The **“Choice”** category mainly consists of the possibility of choice for childcare before school and make it financially possible that parents take care of their own children. Half of the **“Financial Support”** category consists of having an allocation/pension for stay-at-home mother/father.

Table 13: *Survey of Mothers in Europe*; Macro-categories of political messages brought forward by respondents by country to European policy makers.

Category	TOTAL	%	France TOTAL	France %	Belgium TOTAL	Belgium %	Hungary TOTAL	Hungary %	Sweden TOTAL	Sweden %	Spain TOTAL	Spain %	Slovakia TOTAL	Slovakia %	Italy TOTAL	Italy %	Finland TOTAL	Finland %	UK TOTAL	UK %
GRAND TOTAL	6905	100%	1363	100%	1247	100%	907	100%	455	100%	1623	100%	227	100%	467	100%	105	100%	511	100%
SUPPORT FAMILIES	700	10%	123	9%	114	9%	94	10%	66	15%	94	6%	54	24%	73	16%	20	19%	62	12%
SUPPORT PARENTS	265	4%	60	4%	53	4%	17	2%	33	7%	36	2%	17	7%	17	4%	0	0%	32	6%
SUPPORT STAY-AT-HOME PARENTS	884	13%	291	21%	164	13%	84	9%	45	10%	113	7%	19	8%	25	5%	11	10%	132	26%
CHOICE	674	10%	109	8%	202	16%	31	3%	122	27%	132	8%	7	3%	35	7%	14	13%	22	4%
FINANCIAL SUPPORT	829	12%	142	10%	243	19%	141	16%	58	13%	49	3%	55	24%	48	10%	34	32%	59	12%
WORK/ FAMILY LIFE BALANCE	2224	32%	368	27%	350	28%	363	40%	69	15%	844	52%	10	4%	154	33%	17	16%	49	10%
GENDER EQUALITY	152	2%	39	3%	19	2%	21	2%	0	0%	47	3%	3	1%	14	3%	5	5%	4	1%
EDUCATION - SCHOOLS	153	2%	51	4%	17	1%	14	2%	18	4%	13	1%	5	2%	6	1%	0	0%	29	6%
VALUES/RESPONSIBILITY	267	4%	26	2%	60	5%	31	3%	8	2%	66	4%	34	15%	10	2%	0	0%	32	6%
RELATIONSHIP	249	4%	45	3%	9	1%	18	2%	35	8%	72	4%	10	4%	3	1%	0	0%	57	11%
DIVERSITY	24	0%	3	0%	3	0%	6	1%	0	0%	1	0%	0	0%	4	1%	0	0%	7	1%
MISCELLANEOUS	484	7%	106	8%	13	1%	87	10%	1	0%	156	10%	13	6%	78	17%	4	4%	26	5%

1st

2nd

3rd

Table 14: Work/Family life Balance Micro-Categories of political messages brought forward by respondents to European policy makers

WORK/FAMILY LIFE BALANCE MICRO-CATEGORIES	#	of % mentions
Increase maternity/parental leaves	505	24%
Balance between work and education of children	441	21%
More flexibility	338	16%
Possibility and choice to work part-time	285	14%
Enough time for parents to be with their children	249	12%
More daycare solutions and better adapted to the live of the parents *	147	7%
More work and better working conditions	136	6%
Telecommute	75	4%
Increase # of days off for holiday and sick children	47	2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2236</b>	<b>31%</b>

\*More and better daycare solutions was also mentioned and classified in other macro-categories.

In Spain, the work/family life balance claims of the surveyed mothers are mainly related to a **“better balance between work and education of children/having enough time for parents to be with their children”** (393 messages) and **“an increase in maternity/parental leave”** (278 messages).

- ✓ *“It is very necessary that measures be adopted since before in Spain, we had the support of our mothers that took care of our children so that we could go to work. But who will help our daughters take care of their children?”*
- ✓ *“The education that our children receive will be crucial for the future of the world and it is important that these children can have enough time with their mother and father.”*
- ✓ *“Working hours need to correspond to the European ones, more compact and with less time to eat. Also, the work hours do not correlate with school hours), the academic holidays do not correspond to the labour ones.*
- ✓ *“It should be the parents who adapt to their children, and not them to their parents, (longer hours in nurseries, more extra-curricular activities...) In short, adapt the parents’ timetables to their children’s, instead of the other way around.”*
- ✓ *“Go deeper in the problem, work-life balance should go beyond the simple fact that it can be profitable for companies. It’s the welfare of our society that’s at stake. To bring our children up to be generous beings, capable of effort, united, oriented towards the future without frustration and with energy to unify people and to care for life, we must take care of the families from the beginning, from a healthy emotional health. We must understand the human being and value life above money.”*
- ✓ *“For me, one of the important things is reconciliation. But to reconcile does not mean that I have more places where I can leave my kids when I work (either in class, after school or during the holidays). It means that we have enough options, flexibility in how to work, so I can decide if my child will be taken care of or if I will take care of him.”*
- ✓ *“We need at least one year maternity leave, plus a leave of absence of a year keeping the job. We do not want more day nurseries we want our children with their families.”*

- ✓ *"Extend the fact that men can also reduce the working day, to relieve women from the fact their child is taken care of by a stranger and that the grandparents don't carry the entire responsibility to allow both parents to work."*
- ✓ *"It is necessary to work on the equality of gender in every life-area. We've had democracy for 30 years and there is still a lot of latent 'machismo'."*

In Hungary, 14% of the respondents demand **"better working conditions in general"** like more work, protection of the workplace, more family-friendly workplaces, higher salary for fathers, which was often not even mentioned in many other countries. Like the other countries, there is also a core demand for better recognition and support of families.

- ✓ *"...To create jobs for the heads of families in order to feel themselves in security."*
- ✓ *"More jobs are needed..."*
- ✓ *"Instead of social benefits create jobs where a father is able to earn so much money he could be able to support even a big family".*
- ✓ *"My message is that fathers (breadwinners) must have a monthly earning which is enough to allow mothers to work only part-time."*
- ✓ *"State child-caring institutions are needed which are suitable also for single mothers who are obliged to work even in the night and they can leave their children there during the night."*
- ✓ *"... The improvement of the quality of day-care institutions is essential."*
- ✓ *"Foster an evolution in the ambiance in the society in which the families (father, mother and children) are able to fulfil their roles and where to having children is not a heroic sacrifice because the common charges are proportionally distributed."*
- ✓ *"Consider families and children as essential communities to be protected and who serve the common good of the society. Give them the possibility to choose which is the best way for them to live and manage their daily life and work. Recognise the burden they bear by educating children."*
- ✓ *"Consider the family as a value and support improvement of the quality of family life by taking the family as a unit."*

In Italy, the top two demands in work/family life balance were more **"flexibility"** (36 messages), **"more opportunities for part-time work"** (35 messages, usually paired with more flexible and accountable services) and the respect of the rights and competences of working mothers. An equivalent number of 36 messages were also linked to a **more family-friendly taxation system**.

- ✓ *"Imagine you are woman willing to work, to improve yourself, and at the same time willing to be a mother. The priority consists in changing the working model: flexibility in working hours, exact job description, fixed salary and bonuses on reached goals, Health Insurance, Childcare centers at the workplaces..."*
- ✓ *"A better protection for working mothers, with more part-time jobs (I couldn't obtain a part-time job!)"*



- ✓ *"Flexibility, part-time jobs, tax cuts on part-time jobs"*
- ✓ *"Part-time should become convenient to employers, and so we need laws in order to make it convenient. Two part-time jobs should cost less than a full-time job!"*
- ✓ *"Children are the future of our society, families have to be helped in giving birth and raising children. Particular attention should be given to mothers, with laws protecting their work and their salary."*
- ✓ *"A Family-friendly taxation system is needed, and more equity in payments and public spending. Unfortunately, politicians don't understand that enabling families to spend money will help the recovery of the economic system."*
- ✓ *"Helping families: Crèches and Baby-sitters should be deducted from taxes."*
- ✓ *"A Family-friendly taxation system, a social policy and different working conditions are necessary to help families."*
- ✓ *"Consider the Family as a resource for the entire society, and therefore: real Family Policies, more crèches, flexible working hours for those willing to balance work and family life (part-time, telecommute, flexible hours...), a Family-friendly taxation system."*
- ✓ *"Adopting a taxation system considering not the individual, but the family (couple+children+other dependent members), and considering children as persons totally in charge of the family (like the French quotient familial)"*

In Belgium, while many surveyed mothers did ask for **an increase in maternity/parental leaves** and **more flexibility** within the "work/family life balance category", there was the highest percentage of demand for a specific **temporary allocation for stay-at-home parents** (155 demands) and a **better recognition of the role of stay-at-home parents** (117 demands)

- ✓ *"Revalue the status of home maker whether permanent or temporary (maternity leave, parental leave, career break,...)/the revaluation comes with better financial remuneration (I find it object that people who are voluntarily unemployed earn more than a mother who takes 1 month of parental leave!!!)"*
- ✓ *"Give mothers a reasonable status so that the ones who choose for maternity don't have to choose between overtiredness (burnout?) or the beggar's staff!!!"*
- ✓ *"It's important that working hours are not too long; make it easier to finish work earlier to pick up children in school. This concerns both men and women, both of us are responsible for our children »*
- ✓ *"It is now sometimes a punishment to have children for several reasons: /unfindable daycare centers with impossible opening hours (ex: from 7u.0 till 17.ur, if you live in Flemish Brabant or East-Flanders and work in Brussels – it does not leave you time to perform your work hours). / We should have at least, like in Luxembourg, a year of maternity leave, without problems. Also the additional parental leave must become more important. Nowadays, it's like you give birth to children who are raised by others. I do not say that I entirely and definitely would like to stop working; I don't think I could do that; but there should be the possibility to spend more time with your children, without financial repercussions. / Children*

*are our future, we always speak about the demographic ageing etc, but you could now become frightened to start having children. /Make work of working mothers and their children! Give them quality time without they have to 'beg' for it."*

- ✓ *« To be able to reconcile school and work hours, at least till the children are 12 years old : 8 or 9 weeks of holidays when we only have 2 or 3 weeks leaves a lot of weeks were one needs to «scramble to place children either in camps or with the family. It's sometimes an organisational nightmare to cover the whole period./ Have better and more childcare structures to welcome sick children. To wake up in the morning and to realise that your child has fever and that he won't be able to go to daycare or to school is at least half a day of vacation consumed. How many times have I not heard that the first home nurse would be become available only in 3 days!"*

In France, the "work/life balance" issue was also brought forward by many French surveyed mothers. One aspect in particular that caught our attention is the 91 messages asking for **"more daycare solutions that are better adapted to the life of parents"**. For example, they say:

- ✓ *«Improve the childcare system ; there are not enough places and the opening hours are not convenient »»*
- ✓ *"...daycare in companies... »*
- ✓ *« That the working hours of mothers match those of the children and that mothers can take time off that is equivalent to the school holidays »*
- ✓ *«Improve the childcare system for preschool children »*

On the other hand, there is little mention of the work/life balance topic in Slovakia (4%), UK (10%), Sweden (15%), and Finland (16%).

In Slovakia, the main message that respondents want to pass to policymakers is linked to **support and recognition of families/parents** with 31%. Examples of quotes in Slovakia on this topic are:

- ✓ *« A honest family = a honest citizen. A supported family = a supported society. A cultivated family=a cultivated citizen.»*
- ✓ *"I regret that it is the family that is actually marginalised in our society.»*
- ✓ *«Protect the family as a fundamental unit of society in all aspects. »*
- ✓ *« All positive 'investments in family not only help the family itself, but also the whole society will benefit from it (which will be multiplied).»*
- ✓ *"More respect for families with several children ; they are the future of our society. One has to improve their life conditions."*
- ✓ *« If you don't have strong families, you won't have anything. »*
- ✓ *« Think about all the children, couples, elderly as if it were yourself » «Improve family policy – everything that we invest in our children will be reimbursed by our future generations. »*

In UK, the main demand from respondents to policy makers is to **support the stay-at-home parents** (over 30%). Another particularity from the English respondents in this survey is the above-average proportion of messages (12%) related to **stable relationships**; in particular, the value of marriage as an institution. (Reminder that UK is the country with by far the highest number of married and older mothers among this survey). Examples of quotes are:

- ✓ *"Love each other / forgive each other / respect each other / stick together."*
- ✓ *"Marriage is what the family is about. A child needs a mother & a father who are committed to each other for life."*
- ✓ *"To realise that our happiness comes from dependable relationships and not from the work that we do."*
- ✓ *"Stop penalising us. Wake up to the reality of every survey ever which tells you clearly that children flourish with 2 parents of different sexes that are married for the long term. Equal does not mean identical so stop pandering to minorities as if it does. Different is different and usually it is not better even though there may be admirable individuals involved. Support, promote, encourage and reward 2-parent families who put in the effort to build and stay that way. "*
- ✓ *"Provide relationship and parenting courses and help for those who are struggling - including those in a stepfamily. Research shows that marriage is the most stable form of family in which to raise children - so promote marriage."*

In Sweden, of the 455 different messages, 112 or 25% were directly linked to a claim for **choice of childcare** before school and making it financially possible for parents to take care on their children instead of daycare.

- ✓ *"...Give us freedom of choice to stay at home with our children. We, the parents, have the right of decision over our children. Give us financial conditions to take care of our children and live on one salary"*
- ✓ *"...Give all children the right to stay at home for AT LEAST 3 years... Let us as parents choose ourselves who of us will stay at home with our children. Give us parents the right to choose childcare and the number of hours our children will be there when we choose to start working."*
- ✓ *"Let us have the right to choose ourselves. We are intelligent adults and more often than not capable of making the right decisions for our own family. ... Surely it is for us to decide who is most suitable to take care of our infants? The state may well have a good child care system but we who choose alternative care should not be punished for it. Stay-at-home moms are looked on as strange in our Swedish society. The most obvious and natural thing for a mother is to want to take care of her children – society is reprogramming us to think otherwise. What is the point of having children if you have to leave them at day care from seven in the morning to five at night and have others raise them?"*
- ✓ *"In the 1950s it was difficult for women to choose a career of their own, because they were supposed to stay at home with their family. Women are still as incapacitated as in the 1950s"*

*when it comes to making her own choices, she is more or less forced to walk the road set up for her by society.”*

- ✓ *“...I feel trapped in a feministic crusade, where I and my free will... do not exist... To increase the wellbeing of my family I would need to make better use of the little time I have with my children by being a full-time mother at home. I am young. I can work outside our home when they get older! Right now I miss out on their childhood, and their picture of mom is a stressed-out woman who does not prioritise them...but goes to work...SIGH!!!”*
- ✓ *“Freedom in childcare. No child under the age of 3 should be left in day-care with many caretakers. No child psychologist recommends that.”*

In Finland, 34 out of the total 105 political messages (or 32%) fell within the **“Financial support”** category. More specifically, 23 of them were claims for an **allocation for stay-at-home parents (mother or father)**.

- ✓ *“One sum per child in order to make the choice to take care of our children ourselves or not...to take or not till the child is 18 years of age by the mother or the father. (Belgium)*
- ✓ *“Support to child-care at home (economic and mental), resources for the children’s wellbeing. Smaller group-sizes for day-care and schools”*
- ✓ *« ....allowance for “under-school age child”; salary like “temporary teacher/carer » (France)*
- ✓ *« More money to a mother who is taking care of children at home until he/she is three years old”*
- ✓ *“Better possibilities to stay at home for fathers in a way that takes into account equally different kinds of jobs, e.g. entrepreneurship”*

Finally, in the “Miscellaneous” macro-category, we can find very diverse messages that could not necessarily be fitted in the other categories. These messages were linked to for example, difficulties of single mothers, sex education, pornography, homeschooling, education to parenthood, the media, alcohol and drugs, “assisting” spouses, mis-representation of women and the family in the media. In Spain, 38 messages did ask politicians to listen to them and show empathy.

## Summary

Across all categories, we found many statements asking to consider family as a resource for the entire society as well as statements on recognising that families with their children are the future of our society.

The mothers with whom we have communicated think and care deeply about their lives as mothers. For the vast majority of respondents, their identity as mother has become the dominant element of their personal identity. And when they speak as mothers they want to be taken seriously by policy makers.

Among the key messages transmitted by the mothers with whom we have consulted are:

1. **Insistence on the specificity of their role and identity as mothers:** Responding mothers share an awareness of being distinct from other women and can explain clearly their own transformation from woman to mother. This insistence should surprise no one. Recent European studies cited in this report show a **consistent contrast in priorities, concerns, and perceptions between mothers and non-mothers**. This distinction is independent of the degree to which mothers participate in the paid labour force. The distinction is not something that is present only among native European mothers or mothers who are in happy marital relationships or who may be pigeon-holed in of any other category system of classification. The differences run deeper than cultural expectations and persist across the full range of generations responding to the survey. Nor have 'modern' or 'post-modern' thinking of present generations effected a significant change.
2. A corollary of the above is that responding mothers see themselves not as generic "*parents*" but as a specific type of parent, equal to, **complementary** to and distinct from fathers, concerning whom mothers have certain clear expectations.

While there are some slight differences by country among the messages of the 8 analysed countries, **the commonalities are clearly overarching the differences**. We have illustrated this report with only 46 quotes out of the 4306 that were analysed, trying to put forth the different messages that mothers want to bring forward to European policymakers. However, there has been a very similar frequency between the top two recurring themes:

- In order to improve their **work/family life balance**, the surveyed mothers demand enough time to educate their children, an increase in maternity/parental leaves, more flexibility, more possibilities and opportunities to work part-time, more family-friendly companies and better adapted daycare solutions.
- With the same frequency, surveyed mothers also want a better recognition of the role of mothers/parents who decide to stay at home temporarily (or not) to take care of their children. They want a better recognition of the **importance of "family care"** and motherhood in society. They want to have a financially-driven choice between a daycare solution and to take care of their under school-age children by themselves.

## Conclusions

The "*Survey of Mothers in Europe*" ran in 10 languages across 16 European countries. Expert interviews, focus groups, survey preparation, and analysis were done by volunteer mothers at MMMEurope's Brussels office. They were assisted by 10 brilliant volunteer mothers in the language areas across Europe. They provided support in translation and in capturing the messages in the open-ended questions. Our immense gratitude goes to them. But, our truest gratitude goes to the thousands of European mothers who have trusted us with their thoughts and concerns. They have given us insight. Their responses represent a "gold mine" of information that we hope will be listened to and exploited by policy makers.

What caught our attention is that over 90% of the surveyed mothers are generally "satisfied" or "very satisfied" as mothers and entertain good overall family relationships with their partner

and their children. According to them, the most important factors that ensure their wellbeing are:

- For their relationship with their children: “stable and harmonious relationships within the family” and “having sufficient time to spend with them”
- For their partners, it is “respect, love and tolerance”

It is indeed somewhat difficult to translate this into actionable policy measures besides creating favorable environments for families to nurture those stable and harmonious relationships within their family.

This is reflected in the messages that the surveyed mothers address to the European policy makers. Mothers do not ask for more love..., they want measures taken that have a direct impact on their day-to-day life:

- In order to improve their **work/family life balance**, the surveyed mothers demand enough time to educate their children (especially the younger mothers who have children still at home), an increase in maternity/parental leaves, more flexibility, more possibilities and opportunities to work part-time, more family-friendly companies and better adapted daycare solutions.
- Mothers want **choice** (clearly written or implied). They do not want to be imposed in a specific model usually based on economic criteria. They want to be respected and enabled in whatever choice they make to raise their children and employment model they choose depending on the lifecycle they are in. They want a better recognition of the **importance of “unpaid family care”** and motherhood in society. They want a better recognition of the role of mothers/parents who decide to stay at home temporarily (or not) to take care of their children. They want a financial solution that enables them to choose between a quality daycare solution and to take care of their under school-age children by themselves.
- Clearly, they want the family to be considered as a resource for the entire society and recognition that families with their children are the future of our society.

As stated before, while there are slight differences by country/region from the mothers, **the commonalities do clearly arch over the differences.**

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Qualtrics, leading survey software company, has graciously provided its tool for this survey. For a thorough description and tutorials consult <http://www.qualtrics.com/survey-software/>

Qualified researchers are invited to request data as csv or SPSS files for secondary analysis. Send requests via contact at [www.mmmeurope.org](http://www.mmmeurope.org).

## ANNEX II

### **European Associations Aiding in the *Survey of Mothers in Europe***

The following is a non-exhaustive list of associations and people who were initially contacted for help with the *Survey of Mothers in Europe*. The majority helped to disseminate (by word-of-mouth) and participate in the survey. Some have provided valuable scientific advice with the survey. While we know with certainty that some have supported this project with enthusiasm, there may be others where we don't know of their support. We express our gratitude to all the people and associations for their support.

ACCION FAMILIAR  
ACFL ACTION CATHOLIQUE DES FEMMES DU LUXEMBOURG  
ACTION FAMILLE-ACTIE GEZIN  
AD AUTREMENT DIT  
AFAMMER  
AFC CONFÉD. NATIONALE DES ASS. FAM. CATH.  
AFEM FEMMES EUR. MÉRIDIONALE  
AFEM,  
AFR ASOCIATIA FEMEILOR DIN ROMANIA WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF ROUMANIE  
ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD EUROPEAN NETWORK  
ANDANTE  
ANEP  
APFN FAMILLES NOMBREUSES  
ARBEITSGEMEINSCHAFT DER DEUTSCHEN FAMILIENORGANISATIONEN (AGF) E.V.  
ASSEMBLAGES  
ASSOCIATION POUR UN NOUVEAU FEMINISM EUROPÉEN  
BICE BUREAU INTERNATIONAL CAHOLIQUE DE L'ENFANCE  
CARE  
CARE FOR EUROPE  
CARITAS  
CATHEDRA DE POLITICAS DE FAMILIA UNIVERSIDAD COMPUTENSE-FUNDACION ACCION  
CEACCU CONFEDERATION ESPANOLA DE AMAS DE CASUMIDORES Y USUARIOS  
CENTRE FOR LABOUR STUDIES (UNIVERSITY OF MALTA),  
CENTRE PLURIDISCIPLINAIRE DE LA PERSONNE  
CFFB COMMISSION DES FEMMES FRANCOPHONES DE BELGIQUE  
CHANT D'OISEAU  
CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO THEIR PARENTS  
CLUB L BENELUX  
CONFEDERATION OF FAMILY ORGANISATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION (COFACE)  
CURAM  
DEUTSCHE GEZELLSCHAFT FUR HAUSWIRTSCHAFT E.V.  
DEUTSCHER ARBEITSKREIS FUR FAMILIENHILFE E.V.  
DONUM VITAE  
DROIT DE NAÎTRE

DUMCF  
 ECOLE DES PARENTS  
 ELFAC  
 ENFANT SANS DROGUE  
 EUROCHILD  
 EUROFOUND  
 EUROPEAN CHILDREN NETWORK  
 EUROPEAN FORUM OF MUSLIM WOMEN  
 EUROPEAN MUSLIM NETWORK  
 EUROPEAN VALUES NETWORK  
 EVANGELISCHE AKTIONSGEMEINSCHAFT FÜR FAMILIENFRAGEN E. V.(EAF)  
 FAMILIENSERVICE GMBH  
 FAMILLES RURALES  
 FAMILY PLATFORM Consortium and Advisory Board' members  
 FÉDÉRATION DE LA MÉDAILLE DE LA FAMILLE FRANÇAISE  
 FEDERCASALINGHE  
 FEFAF FEDERATION DES FEMMES ACTIVES AU FOYER  
 FHF FEMMES/HOMMES & FOYER  
 FIT FOR KIDS  
 FORO ESPANOL DE LA FAMILIA  
 FORUM DELLE ASSOCIAZIONI FAMILIARI  
 FORUM EUROPÉEN DES FEMMES  
 FTM FULLTIME MOTHERS  
 GEZINSBOND  
 HARO FREEDOM OF CHOICE EQUALITY AND PARENTHOOD  
 HOGER INSTITUUT VOOR GEZINSWETENSCHAPPEN HOGESCHOOL UNIVERSITEIT (Joris Dewispelaere)  
 HOME RENAISSANCE FOUNDATION  
 ICCFR INSTITUT COUPLE ET FAMILLE  
 IEF INSTITUTE FOR MARIAGE AND FAMILY  
 IFHE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR HOME ECONOMICS  
 INSTITUT FÜR DEMOGRAPHIE, ALLGEMEINWOHL UND FAMILIE E.V.  
 INT. FED. FOR FAMILY DEVELOPMENT  
 IPFE INSTITUT DE POLITIQUE FAMILIALE  
 KAT. FAMILIENVERBAND OST.  
 KMR KLUB MNOHODETNYCH RODIN  
 LECHE LEAGUE BELGIUM  
 LIGA FÜR DAS KIND  
 LIGA VOOR HET KIND  
 MADRINA FUNDACION  
 MARIAGE CARE,  
 MOIC (MOVIMENTO ITALIANO CASALINGHE)  
 MUMSNET  
 MURS BRISES  
 NOE NAGYCSALADOSOK ORSZAGOS EGYESULETE  
 OBSERVATORY FOR SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE  
 OHFU ÖSTERREICHISCHE HAUSFRAUEN-UNION  
 PARENTS FORUM



PSYCHOENFANTS  
SPAF SYNDICAT DES PERSONNES ACTIVES AU FOYER  
TAKING CARE OF THE WORLD FUNDACJA ZADBAC O SWIAT  
THE FAMILY WATCH  
THE MOTHERS UNION  
UMC ÚNIA MATERSKYCH CENTIER, O.Z.)  
UNFAEF UNION NATIONALE FEMMES ACTIVES AU FOYER  
UNION MONDIAL DES ORGANISATIONS FÉM. CATH  
UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN (Bernard Fusulier & Jacques Marquet)  
VFFM VERBAND DER FAMILIENFRAUEN UND MÄNNER E. V  
VILLE DE BRUXELLES (Chantal Noël)  
WITH  
WORLD FAMILY ORGANIZATION  
WORLD YOUTH ALLIANCE  
WOW WORLD ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN

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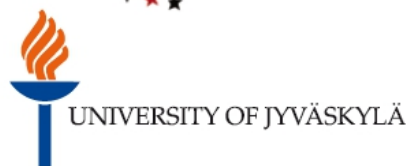
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