

Employment, Family and Community activities: A new balance for women and men

Summary of the Portuguese national report

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This research report aims to provide an overview of the key findings from the project 'Employment, Family and Community Activities: a New Balance for Women and Men in Portugal', the object of which was to examine family services. This involved, inter alia, drawing up an accurate picture of the role played by such services in Portugal in relation to job creation, reconciliation of family and working life and also in equal opportunities for women and men in the home, employment and social life in general. It also sought to identify innovative cases which constitute examples of good practice.

The research involved data collection at three levels:

- a) at macro level, based on documentation, on the principal social changes which have taken place in Portugal over the past few decades, and on national social policies specifically targeting, in one way or another, job creation in this field, equal opportunities for women and men and reconciliation of working and family life;
- b) at a more local level, involving not just documentary research but also fieldwork and interviews with key persons both in official bodies and in employer institutions providing personal care and domestic services, located in two areas in metropolitan Lisbon – Area A (Oeiras e Cascais) and Area B (Loures e Vila Franca de Xira) - with different population characteristics in terms of age and socio-professional categories;
- c) at micro level, based on interviews with workers providing family services, in particular in the area of support for the elderly, childcare, domestic cleaning and laundry services. The aim was to determine the respective social and family characteristics of workers, their vocational routes, their working conditions, their level of work satisfaction and motivation, as well as the difficulties and expectations they have in reconciling work and family life.

Briefly, it should be said that the content of the report, which is divided into four chapters, covers the aspects of Portuguese society and employment in family services set out below.

The report begins by examining the rapid social changes in Portugal, in particular since the beginning of the 1970s, when the country changed from an agrarian society organised on highly traditional lines under a political dictatorship to a democracy entering into the modern world, notably following accession to the European Union in 1986.

A number of social and demographic indicators confirm a sharp rise in school attendance, in particular among women, and changes in the socio-professional categories of the population, with a strong growth in employment in the services sector and one of the highest rates of full-time female activity. As regards family dynamics, two patterns clearly coexist, the traditional and the modern, as witnessed by very high rate of marriages, the large but declining number of catholic weddings, the low, but rising, divorce rate, the sharp fall in the birth rate and the increase in the number of children born outside wedlock.

Concerning social policy, it should be said that the social security system which existed in Portugal prior to the revolution of April 1974 was very rudimentary but coverage was extended to everyone, notably as regards unemployment coverage, by the first provisional governments and in the 1996 Constitution of the Portuguese Republic. As regards social welfare, reference is also made to the role played, in the first instance, by the Catholic Church and the charitable institutions and then, by the end of the 1970s, by the *instituições*

particulares de solidariedade social (IPSS - private welfare institutions) and social welfare cooperatives, which, in the majority of cases, arose from initiatives proposed by the parish priests, the parishes concerned or local populations themselves and whose managing bodies developed these activities as part of the voluntary sector. In general, these bodies operate with State support and the families which use these services pay charges based on their level of declared income.

Although primarily created to provide assistance and support to families in need, these institutions constituted the first moves towards the creation of infrastructures providing childcare support, and secondly support for the elderly. The legislation governing these institutions and the funding they receive from the State is not as yet concerned with the creation of employment, nor does it explicitly enshrine the principles of equal opportunities of women and men at work and in the home.

Furthermore, the initial policies introduced in the 1980s to combat unemployment did not foresee a need for the creation of jobs in the field of provision of family services. It is only since the 1990s, and more specifically the second half of the decade, that a new picture has emerged which establishes a link between social welfare, job creation and reconciliation of work and family life. Of particular note in this regard are the *Iniciativas Locais de Emprego* (local employment initiatives) and the RIME programme (*Regime de Incentivos às Microempresas* – micro-enterprise incentive scheme), and more recently the whole concept of a welfare services labour market. Of the 4000 jobs created between 1997 and 1999 under these initiatives, about 1/3 have been in the field of family services or related activities. Since 1998, the *Plano Nacional de Emprego* (national employment plan) has included a broad range of measures supplementing and extending these programmes, gradually fostering the emergence of a new vision of the provision of support and services to families with financial difficulties. The concept of a support network – targeting both dependent elderly persons and unemployed women – which forms part of the *Planos Regionais de Emprego* (regional employment plans) for Alentejo and the metropolitan area of Porto reflects this change in approach. In addition, there are plans to make preschool education generally available, which could lead to the creation of around ten thousand jobs.

From the point of view of job creation in these areas at national level, INE (*Instituto Nacional de Estatística* – National Statistics Institute) data shows that persons employed in personal and domestic services currently account for 15% of the labour market in Portugal. In terms of job desegregation, this is an area in which the workforce is largely female, with 575 thousand women being employed as opposed to 130 thousand men. As regards total employment in Portugal, this sector accounts for 27% of the female population in employment and 5% of the male population.

The statistics produced by the Social Security Office on the number of workers in domestic services, whilst they must be treated with all due caution, show some 200 thousand workers have become registered in the past 20 years, the vast majority being women.

In addition, other data produced by the Social Security Office relating to social welfare equipment, users and number of workers, shows that the number of persons working in paediatric care (around 30 000 in 1997) has tripled since 1980 and that there are five times more persons providing care to the elderly. However, user waiting lists point to the fact that many more jobs need to be created in these areas: some 24 000 children and 26 000 elderly

persons at home or in institutions, as well as other potential users, are interested in such services.

Surveys at local level confirm the same trends as regards the growth of employment in family support services. It was not possible to provide a detailed breakdown, as was done at national level, since official statistics do not provide the necessary data, however the statistics produced by the *Ministério do Trabalho e Solidariedade* (Ministry of Employment and Solidarity) show that there had been a significant rise in employment in support services for children and senior citizens, and also in laundry and meal preparation services.

From the point of view of the quality of employment in these services, it is noticeable that these jobs are, in general, undertaken by women, have low status and are poorly paid, with the exception, to some extent, of those working with children, and in particular childcare workers, certainly insofar as those employed by public institutions are concerned, who have better pay and work better hours.

However, various collective agreements exist which establish significant differences in salary scales and working time. Examples of innovative measures identified at local level relate both to public personal welfare institutions - with a range of activities, different ways of operating and working conditions seen as constituting good practice - and to small private business initiatives which, despite not being sufficiently large to offer good conditions of work, seek to provide a variety of family services, ranging from household cleaning and maintenance, through laundry to the care of persons, children, patients and the elderly. They all constitute what is termed in this report '*new generations of personal services*'.

Reconciliation of the working and family life of these workers is also analysed and the difficulties encountered and current strategies for resolving them identified, as are expectations. To summarise, it can be said that people's expectations relate to many areas: the family, where they would like to see a fairer division of labour or professional support; work, where they would like to work fewer hours, with working time which can be adjusted to family and personal needs, and access to the services which they themselves provide (care for the elderly and children, laundry services); the community, where they would like more convenient transport to facilitate travel between home and the place of work; the State, in providing childcare facilities at reasonable prices.

Finally, the report sets out in its conclusion the findings of the research undertaken and puts forward proposals for measures which would lead to better qualifications and pay for jobs in this sector and would foster the creation of the innovative services needed by households and which would promote equal opportunities in society in general. The provision of family services at prices which reflect family income could also be a positive factor for reconciliation of work and family life, giving greater equality to women who currently have a dual working day, and for those for whom such activities constitute a route towards vocational rehabilitation and personal autonomy, ensuring that they, in their turn, also have access to such services as users.