

PATERNITY & PARENTAL LEAVES

ASPECTS OF THE GENDER GAP
IN [UNPAID] CARE



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Introduction

Why would an organisation standing for the professional and financial empowerment of women take on a survey which puts men at its centre? The answer to why Women On Top decided to carry out this survey lies, oddly enough, in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, when we realised that, for many Greek men, the lockdowns were the first time they spent such an extended period at home, with their children. For most mothers this was not a new experience, since they had spent at least a number of weeks during the first year of their child/children's lives on a leave, being primarily responsible for their care. But what about the fathers?

This realisation, combined with the data demonstrating the low rate of paternity and parental leave uptake by men, the recent legislation changes on expanding paternity leaves in Greece, and the general information on the gender-based unequal sharing of care responsibilities among Greek families, led us to decide on investing our resources to carry out the study you now have in your hands.

The use of paternity leaves by fathers has been proven to have a positive impact on their relationship with their children and their partners, since their long-term participation in the sharing of care responsibilities at home also plays a part in the health (physical, mental and financial) of the women in the family, and society in general. When men make use of these leaves, they learn more about and become familiar with taking an

equal part in the responsibilities which, even today, are mainly undertaken by the women in the family. This also helps build a more equal relationship between partners, and in supporting those women to pursue professional growth and financial independence on equal terms. Moreover, men's active participation in the family's care obligations nurtures a new generation of young citizens with a perception of gender equality, beyond the stereotypes and rigid gender roles with which many of us have been raised.

Women On Top took on this survey with the aim of outlining the obstacles that hinder men from making use of parental leaves, investigating the gender gap in parental leave uptake, and putting forth policy proposals to promote the wider use of these leaves by fathers. Our hope is that those of you who read it will participate, in your own way, in disseminating the message on the importance and value of having men use their paternity leaves, and also make, in your own sphere of influence, smaller or larger steps that will turn the vision of equal participation in care into reality.

Summary

Parental leaves are included in the policy measures to support working parents, to help them meet their obligations in terms of work and care for their children. Therefore, they are an important tool to promote the more equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, mothers and fathers. To this end, the recent European Directive 1158/2019, transposed into the Greek legislation in 2021, enhances those leaves and significantly extends the duration of paternity leaves, and thus lays the foundations for facilitating work and family life balance, as well as the fathers' more active engagement in parental care.

However, parental leave systems do not necessarily lead to a reduction in the gender gap related to unpaid childcare. Despite the documented benefits from increasing men's participation in childcare and child raising, this continues to be a mostly "female affair".

The Women On Top survey investigates and captures this gap, showing the different concerns men and women have in relation to work/life balance, which correspondingly reflect the different gender undertaking of their parental role, in line with dominant gender stereotypes. Women experience care provision as a more "personal" matter, since, for the most part, they are the ones occupied with it -in comparison to men-, whereas men are more concerned with meeting the needs of their children and look more for solutions "outside the home". This dimension is confirmed by the fact that even though the majority of respondents state they do not stand behind opinions which perpetuate gender expectations, a significant percentage continues to embrace them, with men - and, what is more, younger people irrespective of their gender - clearly being more willing to preserve them.

It is worth noting that about half the men have not made any use of the discussed parental leaves, making it clear that the gender perceptions which "absolve" men from caring for their children are still well entrenched in our daily lives. At the same time, the fathers' "choice" to not use their leaves may be tied to either an internalisation of gender stereotypes or a fear of being judged by their social circle. Moreover, even those who use their paternity leave, which is an exclusive entitlement of the father, consider it a means to support mothers.

Another equally important fact is that, as the Women On Top survey has revealed, the people entitled to parental leaves are not always familiar with the terms and conditions associated with them. Even though - when it comes to leaves that are normally addressed to either parent - there is no notable gender differentiation in terms of degree of familiarity, it is still women who mainly use those leaves. In the case of the men who use these leaves, the choice may be influenced by their partner's employment status.

In any event, the fact that the family decision about taking a leave also depends on the economic effect this will have on the family income, makes it clear that the issue of work/life balance is intertwined with a series of wider gender inequalities (e.g., gender pay gap).

Based on the above findings, it does not come as a surprise that most men believe that making parental leaves mandatory for fathers too - effectively removing the burden of choice from their shoulders - is the measure that would help the most towards them using the leaves. At the same time, most women report that preserving their income, i.e., having full income coverage during the term of a family protection leave, will be a factor promoting the uptake of such leaves.

In order to promote the use of parental leaves by fathers it is also critical to promote institutional interventions, such as:

- a) Increasing the duration of paternity leaves, which despite their recent extension continue to communicate the secondary role that fathers play in child-care
- b) Equating the duration of parental leaves (upward adjustment) for employees in the private and public sector
- c) Taking information and awareness-raising actions regarding the terms of granting parental leaves and combating stereotypes regarding the father's role
- d) Having companies help enhance their employees' understanding of their entitlements and conditions for using parental leaves
- e) Providing incentives to companies for them to promote actions targeting work/life reconciliation for their employees
- f) Formulating corporate policies aimed at work/life reconciliation based on the needs of the employees in each company
- g) Having senior executives make use of parental leaves and other reconciliation measures, as they serve as role models
- h) Implementing on-boarding and off-boarding measures for the male and female employees who take parental leaves, and provided the employees wish to, maintaining communication with them to help them stay in touch with developments at their place of work
- i) Creating a framework for meeting emergency personnel needs, particularly for the small and medium-sized enterprises whose employees use parental leaves.

Nonetheless, the effort towards a more equal sharing of family care responsibilities between men and women cannot and should not be limited to the adoption of measures which are detached from more general interventions and policies in the direction of gender equality, such as bridging the gender pay gap and nurturing a culture of equality in society as a whole.

SECTION 1

Keynotes: conceptualisations and definitions

In the international literature there is no single, universally accepted definition about the concept of reconciling work and family life obligations. However, if we attempted to define its contents, we could say that the term “reconciling”, which is used interchangeably with the terms “aligning”, “combining” and “balancing”, **refers to balancing the sharing of duties and responsibilities, or combining paid and unpaid work.**¹ Until recently, the term work/life reconciliation had been exclusively reserved for and used in reference to working parents. This led to a new critical approach, in order to ensure that the needs of people who do not live with dependants are also taken into account.² However, it is important to clarify that in this study, which is focused on parental leaves, the use of the term is effectively associated with **individuals who are working and are also tasked with caring for dependent family members**, specifically their children.

Starting from the assumption that the concept extends beyond the narrow limits of organising and allocating an individual's time, and relates to a number of other factors, such as **employment status, support measures, family relationship structure and dominant gender mentality, ultimately**, the ability to reconcile work and family life emerges as an important parameter for quality of life.³

In the European Union, the policy for reconciling work and family/private life, already from the 1980s,⁴ ap-

pears to be inextricably linked to the systematic support of women's participation and presence in the labour market. More specifically, this policy is recognised as a **key component for promoting gender equality in the labour market** and is included in proposals and positions for advancing, at least initially, the economic targets of the EU in relation to enhancing women's employability, and, secondarily, encouraging men's equal participation in family life.⁵

Even though initially the concept emerged at the same time as the desire to increase women's participation in the labour market, and the adoption of relevant policies was presented as a means to facilitate and support women, gradually this **gender imbalance started to be redressed**, and, as a result, work/life reconciliation was reframed as a pursuit common for any individual, irrespective of their gender. More specifically, the policy for balancing work and family life is no longer communicated - at least institutionally - as a “*women's issue*”,⁶ but, on the contrary, an effort is made to promote policies which encourage men to undertake family and other domestic responsibilities. Moreover, it is made clear that **the need to combine roles and duties between the public and private domain** does not pertain exclusively to working mothers who wish to ensure their inclusion and stay in the labour market, but is expanded to cover any individual, man or woman, irrespective of their family status and/or professional capacity.

1 To review the literature on the term “reconciliation”, refer to: Germotsi, V., *Couples' Views on the Reconciliation of Family/Private and Professional Life*, Thesis, Post Graduate Programme “Gender and New Educational and Work Environments Within the Society of Information”, Rhodes: University of the Aegean, 2010, p. 6-9 (in Greek).

2 According to the EIGE definition, the term “family life” is now replaced by “personal/private life”.

3 Work/life reconciliation has been recognised as an important factor for an individual's mental wellbeing, as referenced in: Germotsi, V., Moschovakou, N., & Papagiannopoulou, M., *Field Research Findings Report - Gender Equality in the Labour Force: The reconciliation for work and family/private life in the Greek Industries*, Athens: Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, 2016 (in Greek).

4 For a short presentation on the evolution of the European policy on work/life balance see: Karamesini, M., Skompa, M., & Chatzivarnava, E., *Models of social state, models of family and care, and reconciliation policy: Greece in an international crisis*, at: M. Karamesini & M. Symeonaki (edit.), *Reconciliation of work and family life in Greece: Origins, evolution and assessment of a policy*, Athens: Nissos Publications, 2019, p. 34-36.

5 See: Karamesini, M., Skompa, M., & Chatzivarnava, E., *Models of social state, models of family and care, and reconciliation policy: Greece in an international crisis*, at: M. Karamesini & M. Symeonaki (edit.), *Reconciliation of work and family life in Greece: Origins, evolution and assessment of a policy*, Athens: Nissos Publications, 2019, p. 35-36. Also, see: Stratigaki, M., *The Cooptation of Gender Concepts in EU Policies: The Case of “Reconciliation of Work and Family”*, *Social Politics*, 11(1), p. 30-56, 2004, where the author reviews in a critical manner the exclusive linking of the reconciliation policy to the EU's economic priorities.

6 Pandelidou-Malouta, M., *Gender, Society and Politics, 1st Educational Unit*, Athens: Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, 2014, p. 80-81.

Since 2000, article 33 paragraph 2 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights,⁷ a text of binding nature for all EU Member States specifies the right of any individual to protection from dismissal for a reason connected with maternity and the right to paid maternity leave or parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child, “to reconcile family and professional life.”

Different measures are proposed to facilitate the reconciliation of professional and family obligations, including, among others, the introduction of parental leave systems and “family protection” leaves,⁸ arrangements for the care of children, elderly adults, and other dependants, as well as a general re-organising of the work environment to develop a work culture which facilitates a better balancing of women’s and men’s professional and family obligations.

Therefore, parental leaves - or alternatively - leaves that are addressed to and may be used by working parents, are part of the work/life reconciliation policies, i.e., the public policy measures that encourage individuals and allow them to “meet their work obligations and their care obligations towards their families in a satisfactory manner, combining paid and unpaid work and different types of care.”⁹ At the same time, paternity leaves, which are included among the abovementioned leaves, aside from being a policy measure to reconcile the fathers’ work and family obligations, also signal the **acknowledgment of the fact that men have an obligation towards the unpaid care of their children**, and help towards the efforts to enhance men’s care skills and change the stereotypical perceptions regarding gendered social roles.

⁷ European Union, *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Official Journal of the European Union* (2000/C 364/01).

⁸ See, for example, the relevant leaves that are offered in Greece: <https://www.hli.gov.gr/ergasiakes-scheseis/nomothesia-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-gia-tin-prostasia-tis-oikogeneias/> (in Greek)

⁹ Karamesini, M. & Symeonaki, M., Introduction, Professional and family obligations reconciliation policy: A new policy, with multiple targets, at: M. Karamesini & M. Symeonaki (edit.), *Reconciliation of work and family life in Greece: Origins, evolution and assessment of a policy*, Athens: Nissos Publications, 2019, p. 11.

MAIN PARENTAL LEAVES

The four more common types of parental leave,¹⁰ i.e., leaves that are included in a state's institutionalised framework to support parents, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),¹¹ are the following:

Maternity or pregnancy leave

Leave of absence for employed women for a period before and after childbirth (or adoption in some countries). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) convention on maternity leave stipulates that the period of leave should be at least 14 weeks. In most countries, beneficiaries may combine pre- with post-birth leave. In some countries, a short period of pre-birth leave is compulsory, as is a period following birth.

Paternity leave

A leave of absence for employed fathers at or in the first few months after childbirth. In general, periods of paternity leave are much shorter than periods of maternity leave.

Parental leave

A leave of absence for employed parents, which is often supplementary to specific maternity and paternity leave periods. Frequently, this leave follows the period of maternity leave. Entitlements to parental leave itself are often individual (i.e., each parent has their own entitlement), but entitlements to public income support during parental leave are frequently family-based, meaning that only one parent can claim income support at any one time. In some countries, certain periods of parental leave are reserved for use only by the mother or father and cannot be transferred.

Child raising leave¹²

A leave of absence that sometimes follows parental leave and that typically allows at least one parent to remain at home to provide care until the child is 2 or 3 years of age. This leave is less common than the other three types of leave.

¹⁰ In the context of the qualitative and quantitative survey, the 4 leaves that were studied in the Greek framework are the following: Paternity leave, Special maternity protection benefit, Child care leave, and Parental leave. Details for these leaves are provided in a subsequent Section.

¹¹ See: https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF2_1_Parental_leave_systems.pdf

¹² The relevant OECD text refers to this leave as “home care” leave, “childcare” or “child raising” leave. Here we use the term “child raising” leave, as this is the term used in Greece.

At this point it is important to note that designing and implementing reconciliation policies must be with a view to **ensuring the financial independence of the men and women** who make use of these institutional capacities (e.g., they take leaves of absence), and choose to dedicate their time to their children or other family members.¹³ However, special attention should be paid to setting up the framework for conceptualising and promoting the reconciliation policies and addressing the unbalance in the sharing¹⁴ of care responsibilities between men and women,¹⁵ which preserves and enhances, among other factors, the gender pay gap and the gender pension gap,¹⁶ ultimately creating a relationship in which one feeds on the other and perpetuating gender inequalities. For example, women, as main caregivers, often choose to retire from the labour market to take care of their children and/or other dependants and are consequently exposed to **prolonged financial insecurity** (the motherhood penalty / care penalty). Even when they do not completely leave the labour market, **they are forced into breaks in their professional career** or choose to return to the labour market in part-time and/or less specialised positions, which are also less well paid. These life “choices”, which are not independent from the gender stereotypes about care provision, end up having **serious consequences on living conditions and perpetuate the gender gap in different fields.**

¹³ European Parliament. FEMM Committee Report, *Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave: Data Related to Duration and Compensation Rates in the European Union*. Brussels: European Union, 2015, p. 27.

¹⁴ As referenced in a Report by the FEMM Committee of the European Parliament (see previous footnote), according to the ILO, eliminating inequalities in the split of paid employment and unpaid care and domestic work between men and women may potentially be the most important social development of the 21st century. To this end, ILO considers the fathers' active involvement in care work as a main parameter of the aforementioned development.

¹⁵ According to the 2022 Global Gender Gap Report of the World Economic Forum, men dedicate to unpaid work only 1/3 of the time that women do. Data from 33 countries demonstrate that men's share of time spent in unpaid work (as a proportion of time spent in total work) was 19%, while for women this figure was 55%. See: World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2022*, July 2022, Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2022., p. 35. Similarly, the “motherhood penalty” or “care penalty” is referenced, with the aim of highlighting the disadvantageous position of women and/or women and men carers in the labour market. See: Communication from the Commission, COM(2017)678 of 20.11.2017 on the EU Action Plan 2017-2019 Tackling the gender pay gap, p. 10-11.

¹⁶ See: Communication from the Commission, COM(2017)678 of 20.11.2017 on the EU Action Plan 2017-2019 Tackling the gender pay gap, p. 11, and, especially, note 34, where it is noted that in 2016 the percentage of mothers with children aged up to 6 years old who were outside the labour market and not having any economic activity stood at 28.6%, compared to only 4.1% of fathers. See also: European Commission, Peer Review on ‘*The financial impact of maternity and paternity leave*’ - Synthesis Report, Prague, Czech Republic, 8-9 October 2018, p. 7.

EUROPEAN DIRECTIVE 2019/1158¹⁷ ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE FOR PARENTS AND CARERS

The adoption of Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers changes the landscape on the reconciliation policy at the EU level. Aside from taking steps to maintain high employability rates for women, the Directive acknowledges the existence of gender stereotypes in the professional life and in the undertaking of care responsibilities and stresses the need for equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men.¹⁸

Directive 2019/1158 aims at ensuring equality in the participation in the labour market, simultaneously promoting the gender-balanced uptake of leaves and flexible working arrangements, to allow both men and women to better balance their care responsibilities with the demands of their professional life.

In this context, the Directive also defines the minimum requirements for parental leaves, paternity leaves and care leaves. Moreover, the Directive gives the right to parental leave to the second parent, creating an incentive for fathers to make use of parental or paternity leaves and, therefore, to undertake care responsibilities. More specifically, Directive 2019/1158 institutionalises at an EU level the right to a paternity leave, also defining 10 days as its minimum period.¹⁹

¹⁷ Directive 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 20 June 2019, on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18 EU, PE/20/2019/REV/1.

¹⁸ See recitals no. 10, 11, 21 of the Directive.

¹⁹ As presented below, Greece adopted the relevant provisions via Law 4808/2021 (articles 24 et seq.) extending the period of the paternity leave to 14 days, instead of the 2 days which were provisioned by previously applicable Law 3801/2009 (article 18), based on National Collective Agreement 2000 and 2001.

SECTION 2

Towards a more equal sharing of care responsibilities: benefits, men's role, and persistent gender stereotypes

In the previous section, the institutionalisation of paternity leaves was referenced as a means to pursue a more equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men, and also to enhance men's participation in family obligations related to care work. This pursuit effectively includes the challenging of the dominant gender stereotypes regarding care and societal roles in general.

In this context, in recent years, research has been carried out in many countries in order to highlight the **many benefits from the uptake of paternity leaves and the fathers' increased participation in childcare**. For example, a recent study (2019) carried out in USA²⁰ revealed that even up to 9 years after a paternity leave had been used, children of fathers who stayed with them at home for at least 2 weeks after birth stated they feel closer to them in comparison to children whose fathers did not make use of a paternity leave. Moreover, experiential data shows that the fathers' active participation in child raising has a **positive impact on children on a cognitive and social-emotional level**,²¹ and that the use of paternity leaves facilitates this participation, as well as the father-child bond.²² Similarly, research from different countries confirms that fathers who take longer paternity leaves are more satisfied in their role as parents and are more actively involved in raising their children and caring for them.^{23, 24}

It should be noted that fathers and children are not the only ones who benefit from the use of paternity leaves and men's involvement in child raising, as the positive effect extends to mothers as well. The findings of a recent Swedish study regarding the effect that fathers' staying at home has on the new mothers' health speaks volumes. The mothers whose partners were able to take a paid paternity leave were **less likely to receive antibiotic and anti-anxiety drugs during their child's first year of life**.²⁵ This is due to the fact that fathers build a more solid bond with their children and are willing to dedicate more time to them on the one hand, while on the other their participation in childcare during the first weeks of the baby's life allows them to become familiar with their new duties and prevents the occurrence of the phenomenon where only mothers acquire the necessary skills to efficiently hand these tasks.

The fathers' involvement in childcare also naturally aids their partners' participation in the labour market: on average, in families where the father has taken a leave after childbirth, the mother's salary appears to increase by 6.7% for every month of leave taken by her partner.²⁶ These results are especially positive not only for the long term economic and social status of these families, but for further promoting gender equality in the family, the workplace and public life.

20 Petts, R.J., Knoester, C. & Waldfogel, J., Fathers' Paternity Leave-Taking and Children's Perceptions of Father-Child Relationships in the United States, *Sex Roles*, 82, p. 173-188, 2020.

21 Lamb, M.E., *The role of father in child development*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2010.

22 Tanaka, S. & Waldfogel, J., Effects of parental leave and work hours on fathers' involvement with their babies. *Community, Work and Family*, 10, p. 409-426, 2007.

23 Huerta, M. et al., *Fathers' Leave, Fathers' Involvement and Child Development: Are They Related? Evidence from Four OECD Countries*. OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, No. 140, 2013.

24 Hass, L. & Hwang, P., The Impact of Taking Parental Leave on Fathers' Participation in Childcare and Relationships with Children: Lessons from Sweden. *Community, Work and Family*, 11(1), p. 85-104, 2008.

25 Persson, P. & Rossin-Slater, M., *When Dad Can Stay Home: Fathers' Workplace Flexibility and Maternal Health*. No. 25902, National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series, 2019.

26 Johansson, E.A., *The effect of own and spousal parental leave on earnings*, Institute for Labour Market Policy Evaluation, working paper, 4, 2010, p. 35.

Over the last decades a shift has been noted in young men's mentality within the family, as their **fatherly role is understood as more equal to that of the mother.**²⁷ Relevant studies report that the vast majority of men consider their participation in childcare extremely important, already from the first months for the baby's life.²⁸ Men are now **more willing to share responsibilities** and wish to spend time at home to take care of housework, also meeting care needs.²⁹ This shift is also reflected in the way in which men themselves experience the conflict between family and work. As a result, there is now a growing number of men demanding a better balance between work and family life.³⁰

This gradual shift in men's/fathers' perceptions, which is accompanied by data (such as those presented above) related to the positive impact that the fathers' active presence and care has on children's development, has led to a **new conceptualisation of fatherhood or the role of the father** ("new or modern father" / "new or involved father"), which puts a dent in the traditional stereotypical views on gender roles, within and potentially outside the family. These views, which are eloquently described by the antithesis male-breadwinner / female-housekeeper or caregiver, spotlight men as the protectors of the family, financially and socially/morally responsible for it. Identifying with concepts such as strength and responsibility within the family, the man is juxtaposed to the "ideal mother", who maintains an unbreakable bond with the child and expresses this emotional connection.³¹

These stereotypes, despite their partial re-negotiation and consequent gradual shift in the traditional social models, are nonetheless **present to a decisive extent**³² in gender relationships and roles, significantly impacting the share of care responsibilities within the family. In other words, the father is no longer treated one-dimensionally, as the worker/breadwinner, especially so due to the "double career" model,³³ but the mother continues to maintain her role as the main caregiver.^{34, 35} Even today, women undertake a larger share in care responsibilities, not only for their children but for other dependent family members with increased care needs (e.g., elderly adults or persons with disabilities).

According to the European Quality of Life Surveys (EQLS) 2016, carried out by Eurofound, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, **88% of mothers in Europe care for their children on a daily basis, whereas the corresponding percentage for men is 64%.** Based on the same source, fathers spend approximately 21 hours per week caring for the children, whereas the corresponding time for mothers is 39 hours.³⁶ Especially **in the case of Greece**, the recent findings of a survey that used primary data from the Time Use Survey by the Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT) are very revealing. Based on these, women (20-74), working or not, spend significantly more time on a daily basis taking care of their household and family in relation to men.³⁷ Moreover, a survey by the Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, in a sample of 942 women workers in the Greek industry, revealed that as regards the

27 Arvanitis, K., Xydopoulou E., Papagiannopoulou M., *Handbook on the role of men/fathers in balancing family and work life*, Athens: Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, 2007, p. 20 (in Greek).

28 UN, *Men in Families and family policy in a changing world*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2011.

29 In the Nordic countries, men's involvement in domestic care responsibilities is impressive, while similar data is reported from other European countries, where a growing number of men undertakes more responsibilities in relation to domestic work and childcare. See Koronaïou A., *The Role of Fathers in Balancing Professional and Family/Private Life*, Athens: Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, 2007.

30 UN, *Men in Families and family policy in a changing world*, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2011, p. 65.

31 Koronaïou A., *The Role of Fathers in Balancing Professional and Family/Private Life*, Athens: Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, 2007, p. 113.

32 See, for example: EIGE, *Reconciliation of work, family and private life in the European Union: Policy review*, 2017, p. 49, where it is stated that the traditional male-breadwinner/female-housekeeper model is supported in most European States, either explicitly or implicitly; for example, through tax and social insurance regulations.

33 The "double career model" reflects the change brought on by women's participation in the labour market, which has led to both spouses/partners contributing to the family budget.

34 Huerta, M., Adema, W., Baxter, J., Han, W.J., Lausten, M., Lee, R. & Waldfogel, J., *Fathers' Leave and Fathers' Involvement: Evidence from Four OECD Countries*. *European Journal of Social Security*, 16(4): 308-346, 2014.

35 Germotsi, V., *Couples' Views on the Reconciliation of Family/Private and Professional Life*, Thesis, Post Graduate Programme "Gender and New Educational and Work Environments Within the Society of Information", Rhodes: University of the Aegean, 2010.

36 Eurofound, *European Quality of Life Survey 2016: Quality of life, quality of public services, and quality of society*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017, p. 43.

37 Karamesini, M. & Symeonaki, M., *Meta-analysis of the time use survey*, Athens: Centre for Gender Studies, Panteion University. 2016.

sharing of family responsibilities, the vast majority of women is responsible for childcare, and that women more frequently take on activities related to meeting the personal needs of their children and also accompany their children in their different activities.³⁸

Therefore, as apparent, cultural/social standards, perceptions, and stereotypes, all significantly affect the **sharing of care responsibilities** and, by implication, the corresponding choices in relation to the use of parental leaves. However, the above finding has two sides: On the one hand, the legal provisions that exclusively put motherhood at the centre, and, consequently, women's reproductive role, while at the same time sustain paternity leaves that are extremely short in duration, favour the perpetuation of the dominant gendered perceptions about care, identifying care responsibilities with mothers.³⁹ Specifically, this is a way to reproduce and enhance the main stereotypical perception that puts women at home, tasked with providing unpaid care to dependent family members, **while men are kept out of the home, engaged in their paid work and being primarily re-**

sponsible for financially supporting the family.⁴⁰

On the other hand, these stereotypes, that have men being responsible for the financial independence and wellbeing of the family and disconnected from childcare, and women as the main caregivers who stay at home and raise the children, discourage men on a personal level to make use of their legal entitlements, **arousing in them feelings of guilt, shame and ultimately an unwillingness to take time off work.** Consequently, gender stereotypes inform and shape behaviours and practices in the workplace, especially those of the employers, playing a part in nurturing a work climate that also sends a discouraging message even to those who (initially) intend on not conforming to the dominant gender roles in relation to childcare. Lastly, along the same lines, it should be noted that a **lack of support from the work environment** (both men and women employers, colleagues, and supervisors) and the lack of information on the employees' entitlements, especially in relation to the work/life reconciliation policies, lead to the relevant measures not being utilised.⁴¹

38 Germotsi, V., Moschovakou, N., & Papagiannopoulou, M., *Field Research Findings Report – Gender Equality in the Labour Force: The reconciliation for work and family/private life in the Greek Industries*, Athens: Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, 2016 (in Greek).

39 The previous legal status in Greece, where only two days were provided as paternity leave at the time of childbirth, could also be included here. A 2016 OECD survey underlined the particularly short duration of paternity leaves enacted worldwide, as the majority of the OECD member countries do not offer more than 2 weeks of leave, while only 12 of the OECD countries have statutory paid paternity leaves of at least 2 months in duration.

40 Arvanitis, K., Xydopoulou E., Papagiannopoulou M., *Handbook on the role of men/fathers in balancing family and work life*, Athens: Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, 2007.

41 Karamesini, M., Skompa, M., & Chatzivarnava, E., *Models of social state, models of family and care, and reconciliation policy: Greece in an international crisis*, (p. 17-60), at: M. Karamesini & M. Symeonaki (edit.), *Reconciliation of work and family life in Greece: Origins, evolution and assessment of a policy*, Athens: Nissos Publications, 2019, p. 52. This is in line with the findings/results of this survey, as presented below, underlining the special attention that must be paid to the need to achieve a shift in the work culture.

SECTION 3

Review of data on parental leaves in EU countries

The comparative review of parental leave systems in the EU member states reveals significant differences in terms of the duration of those leaves, as well as in terms of the pay/allowance provisioned for those days of leave.

The average duration of **maternity leave** in the EU, according to a 2015 report by the FEMM Committee of the European Parliament, before the adoption of the recent Directive 2019/1158, was **23 weeks**,⁴² whereas the corresponding **paternity leave** was 12.5 days, with countries, such as Slovenia, offering 64 days of leave, while Greece and Italy, at the bottom of the list, provided only 2 and 1 days of paternity leave, respectively. Nonetheless, there were also Member States, such as Cyprus, Germany and the Czech Republic, where paternity leaves had not been institutionalised.⁴³ Paternity leaves, even if, for the most part, had a short duration, were fully or largely paid, as in most Member States, Greece included,⁴⁴ the income of the person taking the leave was fully covered (100% of the work income).

The data is different in the case of **parental leaves**, which are, for the most part, used by either parent. More specifically, according to the FEMM report, the duration of this leave is noticeably longer than the paternity leave, with Greece ranking first among Member States, offering 2 years of leave per parent to employ-

ees of the public sector. Despite the extended duration of the parental leave,⁴⁵ in 2018, the income coverage for persons taking the leave in EU was found to be approximately 50% on average.⁴⁶ The large drop in the figure is due to the fact that Member States which had no coverage for parental leave uptake were included in the calculation; such countries are Greece, Cyprus and Malta.⁴⁷ Only among one third of the states the ratio of income coverage varies between 80% and 100%, but this is usually tied to certain upper/lower thresholds and/or refers to periods shorter than the entire duration of the leave.⁴⁸ According to the FEMM report, Greece is among the states with the lowest allowance rates, including the maternity leave allowance, along with Spain and Malta.^{49, 50}

In terms of the **parental leave uptake rates** by men in Europe, a small but steady increase had been recorded over the last 15 years. The starting point of this increase is, as a rule, a low one. According to a Eurofound survey, published in 2018, in many Member States (e.g., Spain, Estonia, Slovakia and Czechia) the percentage of men/fathers who made use of these leaves was especially low (near 10%).⁵¹

Especially for the case of parental leaves, the average uptake rate stands at 10% for the 23 Member States, with Greece ranking at the bottom of the list (rate

42 A number exceeding the 18 weeks that are recommended as an average duration of maternity leave by the International Labour Organisation.

43 European Parliament. FEMM Committee Report, *Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave: Data Related to Duration and Compensation Rates in the European Union*. Brussels: European Union, 2015, p. 59.

44 *As above*, p. 62.

45 The average duration of parental leaves in the EU was 87 weeks, according to the aforementioned FEMM report, p. 67-69.

46 Some countries offer a one-off allowance, not tied to the prior income amount, and other countries offer the relevant benefits as a percentage of prior income, including lower and upper thresholds, see: European Commission, Peer Review on 'The financial impact of maternity and paternity leave' - Synthesis Report, Prague, Czech Republic, 8-9 October 2018.

47 There were, however, states, such as Estonia, Denmark and Slovenia, which offered fully paid parental leaves (100% of the work income).

48 Eurofound, *Parental and paternity leave - Uptake by fathers*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019, p. 8.

49 European Parliament. FEMM Committee Report, *Maternity, Paternity and Parental Leave: Data Related to Duration and Compensation Rates in the European Union*. Brussels: European Union, 2015, p. 77.

50 Even though it is not directly tied to parental leaves, it should be noted that as of 2020, with Law 4659/2020, Greece adopted a birth allowance of 2000 euro per child.

51 Eurofound, *Parental and paternity leave - Uptake by fathers*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019, p. 13-14.

of 0.02%) and Sweden, where 44% of men used the leave, ranking at the top.⁵² Previous statistics, from 2010, showed that, of the leave that can be shared between parents, about 40% is taken by women and only 2% by men.⁵³ According to the RAND report, an increase in the uptake is noted among the majority of the Member States over the period 2009-2016, especially in relation to paternity leaves which are the most flexible benefit, since their duration is short, but they are fully or, in any case, largely paid. This increase is small but steady, with high rates starting to become apparent in Slovenia as of 2009, where 80 men per 100 childbirths make use of the corresponding 15-day fully paid leave.⁵⁴ Similar trends are noted in Denmark, Portugal and Spain, and, as of 2013, in the Baltic states and Poland, too. Consistently high rates of leave uptake are recorded in Sweden and Finland.⁵⁵

In contrast, in the case of other parental leaves, with significantly lower or even no income coverage, the uptake is more limited. In at least 11 countries, including Spain and Eastern Europe countries, such as Poland, Bulgaria and Hungary, the percentage of men who make use of parental leaves is less than 10% of those entitled to it.⁵⁶ In Greece, for example, despite the limited statistical data for 2013, the number of full-time, male, private sector employees who made use of parental leaves was very low in comparison to their female colleagues: only 12 men compared to 1.136 women, with those figures only slightly increasing for other leaves, such as leave in case of sickness of dependent family members or leave to monitor the child's school performance.⁵⁷ In contrast, there are countries, such as Portugal, where, according to the Eurofound data (2019), an increase as high as 30% is recorded within a decade.⁵⁸

Moreover, to the extent that parental leaves are not a personal entitlement but one that applies to the family as a whole, and, therefore, the leave period can be shared between the two parents, mothers tend to make use of parental leaves for much longer periods compared to fathers, confirming what was discussed above. In Germany and Sweden, for example, mothers make use of parental leaves for a period that is 4 times as long as that of the fathers, whereas in Denmark, that period is 10 times longer, respectively.⁵⁹ Along the same lines, a recent OECD report from April 2022 confirms that paid parental leave is mostly taken up by mothers.⁶⁰ Based on the OECD data, this fact is mainly associated with the gender pay gap, as fathers, in general, are paid better and, as a result, if they decide to take time off work, the total family income suffers more.

Other factors affecting the uptake of parental leaves relate to the **features of their design**. More specifically, aside from what was discussed in the previous section about how the parental leave systems - which, for the most part, sustain the notion that care is an exclusively "female affair"- reproduce the dominant gender model in relation to sharing responsibilities, there are some "technical" details also affecting the uptake of said leaves. The duration, the potential parties entitled to the leaves, the ability to transfer or not these leaves, as well as other flexible arrangements accompanying these measures, such as part-time work, remote work or work with reduced hours, are factors that play an important role in the use of the leaves per gender.⁶¹ In this context, providing incentives to increase the use of parental leaves is a means to encourage men to become more actively involved in family care activities, and paves the way towards

52 Van Belle, J., *Paternity and parental leave policies across the European Union*, RAND Europe, 2016, p. 9.

53 *As above*, p. 3.

54 Eurofound, *Parental and paternity leave - Uptake by fathers*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019, p. 10.

55 *As above*, p. 13-14.

56 *As above*, p. 13-14.

57 Karamesini, M., Skompa, M., & Chatzivarnava, E., *Literature Review and Policy Analysis related to the Reconciliation of Professional and Family/Private Life*, Athens: Centre for Gender Studies, Panteion University, 2016, p. 46-47.

58 Eurofound, *Parental and paternity leave - Uptake by fathers*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019, p. 13.

59 *As above*, p. 16.

60 See: <https://oecdstatistics.blog/2023/01/12/paid-parental-leave-big-differences-for-mothers-and-fathers/>

61 Eurofound, *Parental and paternity leave - Uptake by fathers*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019, p. 19.

the gradual bridging of the relevant gender gap in terms of the roles that are related to caring for dependants. A typical such example is the case of granting a base parental leave allowance in Germany, which was paid for 2 additional months when both parents used at least 2 months of said leave. The adoption of Partnerschaftsbonus or partnership bonus is another favourable provision, rewarding the equal uptake of leave by providing four additional months of parental benefits in the case when both parents work part-time (25-30 hours per week) for a period of four months. With the adoption of the above favourable provisions, the parental leave uptake rate for fathers increased significantly: from 3.5% in 2006 to 36.5% in 2018.⁶² There are, however, other examples, such as Slovenia, where despite the long duration of parental leave (130 days) and paternity leave (30 days) the uptake rates are kept low, as only 20% of men make use of the former and 7% of the latter.⁶³ This may be explained by the influence of other factors which can act dissuasively, such as the **parental benefits amount** paid with the uptake of parental leave.

Based on the above, the parental leave systems in the EU countries show some differences, reflecting, to a great extent, the different approach and different priorities in each Member State in addressing the gender gap in the field of unpaid care and promoting men and women's equal participation in the labour market. Without necessarily claiming that the adoption of favourable provisions to encourage the use of parental leaves equals or even signals the challenging of gender stereotypes, it is important to note that this is a precondition which also serves to provide meaningful tools for promoting men and women's more equal engagement both in domestic care duties and in the world of work.

⁶² European Commission, Peer Review on 'The financial impact of maternity and paternity leave' - Synthesis Report, Prague, Czech Republic, 8-9 October 2018, p. 12.

⁶³ As above, p. 13.

SECTION 4

New legislation: Law 4808/2021

The adoption of recent Law 4808/2021, which, among others, incorporates (PART III) the provisions of Directive 2019/1158 into the Greek legislation (see Section 1), further enhances the national legal framework on work/life reconciliation, and introduces an array of provisions that prevent or discourage the removal from the labour market of workers, mainly women, with significant care responsibilities.

In terms of parental leaves, and more specifically paternity leaves, it should be noted that the new legal frame significantly extends the minimum duration laid out by the Directive (10 days), specifying **a 14-day paid paternity leave** for all employees, to be taken at once or in blocks. More specifically, according to Law 4808/2021, any working father may, upon applying and timely notifying their employer, take either (a) 2 days of leave before the expected birth date, where the remaining 12 days are used, either at once or in blocks, within 30 days from birth or (b) the entire leave after the birth date. Paternity leaves are also given in the case of adoption or fostering of a child, aged up to 8 years, from the time the child is given to the family, whereas it is not possible to increase the duration of the leave due to the birth of twins or triplets.

Moreover, a **parental leave allowance** is specified for the first time, as a personal and non-transferable entitlement of any working parent, natural or adoptive, as well as of any person holding parental responsibility, for a duration of 4 months, to be paid at once or in instalments until the child reaches 8 years of age. The allowance is monthly, concerns the first 2 months of the leave and is equal to minimum wage.

In addition, a **5-day caretaker leave** is introduced, which aims at supporting working caretakers, men, and women, in meeting increased care or support responsibilities in relation to family members or others residing in the same household, for serious medical reasons.

It is also interesting that priority is given to **establishing significant flexibility at work** for working parents. For example, parental leave may be granted in alternative ways, such as through reduced daily hours or in days of leave, taken on a weekly or monthly basis, without prejudice to the employee's right to receive the relevant allowance. Moreover, these flexible arrangements, such as teleworking, flexible working hours or part-time employment, can be requested by any employee who is a parent of a child aged up to 12 years or a caretaker, after been employed 6 months at the same employer.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ With the completion of this expansion, and more specifically with Law 4997/2022 and articles 43 and 44 in particular, two more amendments were introduced to the Greek laws: a) the extension of the special maternity protection benefit from 6 to 9 months, and b) the right to transfer 7 months to the father.

SECTION 5

Results of the quantitative and qualitative survey

5.1 | SURVEY IDENTITY

This section presents the **main findings** of the primary survey carried out by Women On Top, with the support of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung foundation and the cooperation of qed. The main purpose of the survey, which includes **both a qualitative and quantitative part**, was to investigate the gender aspect related to the familiarity with and use of the **4 parental leaves** by employees of the private sector, i.e., the leaves that are addressed to and may be taken up by men and women employed in the private sector. In detail, the survey focused on men's and women's familiarity with, use of and intention of using these leaves, as well as on a wider picture of the relevant challenges faced by private sector employees and their beliefs surrounding parenting leaves in relation to gender roles.

The main goals of the survey were:

- To investigate the **conditions** (problems, needs) that encourage or discourage the use of said leaves
- To record the **perceptions and attitudes** related to the sharing of family obligations based on gender and gender roles in general, which inform the employees' decisions in relation to the use of leaves for the protection of the family
- To capture the **degree of familiarity** with and use of said leaves by working parents
- To identify the **consequences** (positive and/or negative) related to the choices of working parents on the use of leaves for the protection of the family.

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY IDENTITY

METHOD

Closed-type questionnaires / Online forms

DATA COLLECTION PERIOD

16/9/2022 - 23/9/2022

SAMPLE TOTAL | 504 people | Nation-wide representative sample

GENDER | 297 women and 207 men

AGE | 18-54

PARENTAL STATUS

Parents of children aged up to 12 years / persons intending to have children in the next 1-4 years

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Private sector employees

QUALITATIVE SURVEY IDENTITY

METHOD

Semi-structured interviews

DATA COLLECTION PERIOD

1/11/2022 - 30/11/2022

SAMPLE TOTAL | 12 persons / 6 heterosexual couples

GENDER | 6 women and 6 men

PARENTAL STATUS

Parents of children aged up to 12 years / persons intending to have children in the next 1-4 years

EMPLOYMENT STATUS | Double career couples employed in the private sector

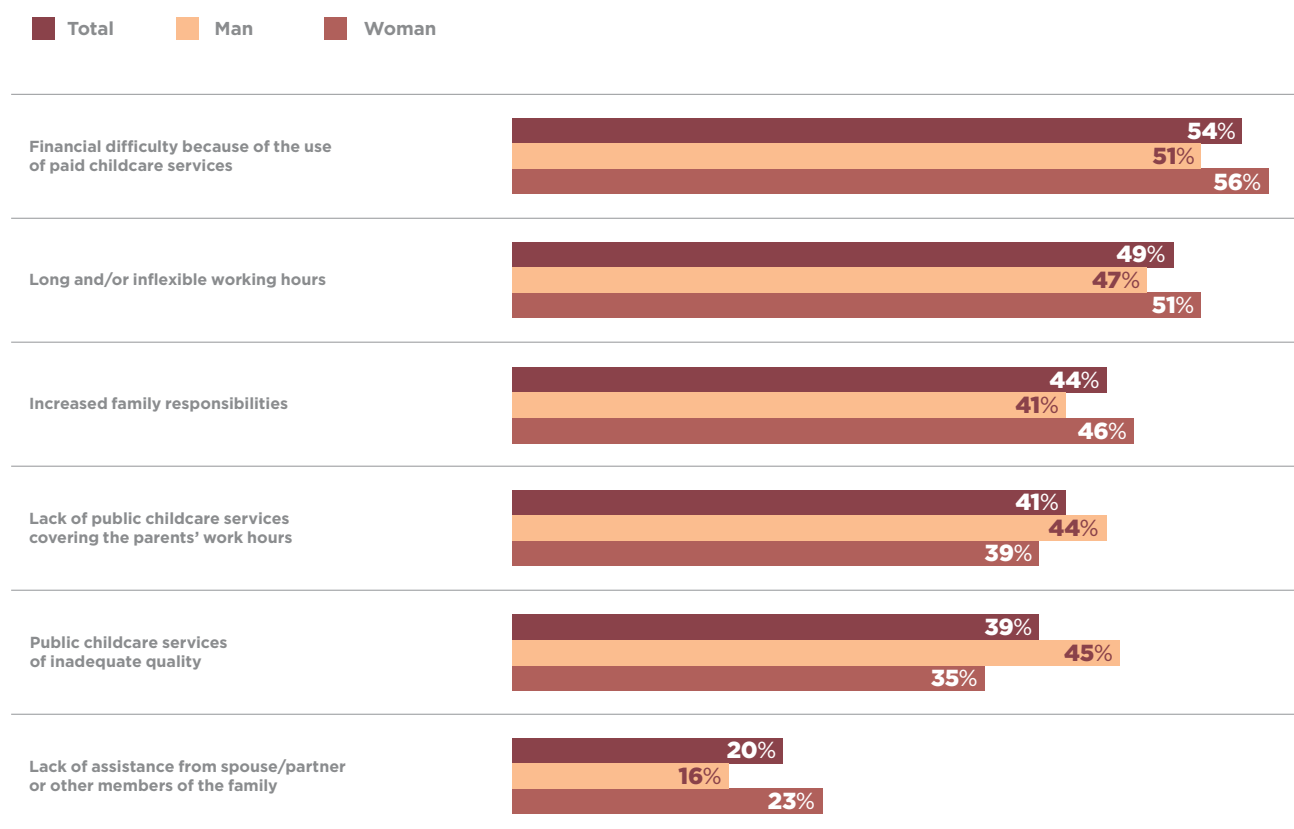
5.2 | WORK/LIFE RECONCILIATION

Given the profile of the survey sample, the question of work/life reconciliation is a key challenge in the participants' day-to-day life. However, a deeper investigation into the different aspects of the subject reveals some interesting details in relation to a gender approach. More specifically, there is no significant differentiation by gender in relation to the issues that men and women are more concerned about regarding work/life reconciliation (Graph 1). It should be noted, however, that, as

seen in the following Graph, for men, **the lack of public facilities and the inadequacy of the public childcare services**, and, therefore, the provision of "solutions" from external factors, are the issues that concern them the most, in comparison to women who seem to be more troubled about their own participation and share of responsibility (work hours, financial difficulties, etc.) in their efforts to care for their children (Graph 1).

GRAPH 1

ISSUES CONCERNING MEN AND WOMEN IN RELATION TO WORK/LIFE RECONCILIATION



The aforementioned conclusion is in line with the information presented in the previous section, in relation to the long-standing notion that women are the main caregivers. In this context, women are the ones who experience childcare as a more “personal” issue. As one of the participants very eloquently put it:

“Aside from finding someone to babysit your child, for me it is important that you are present.”

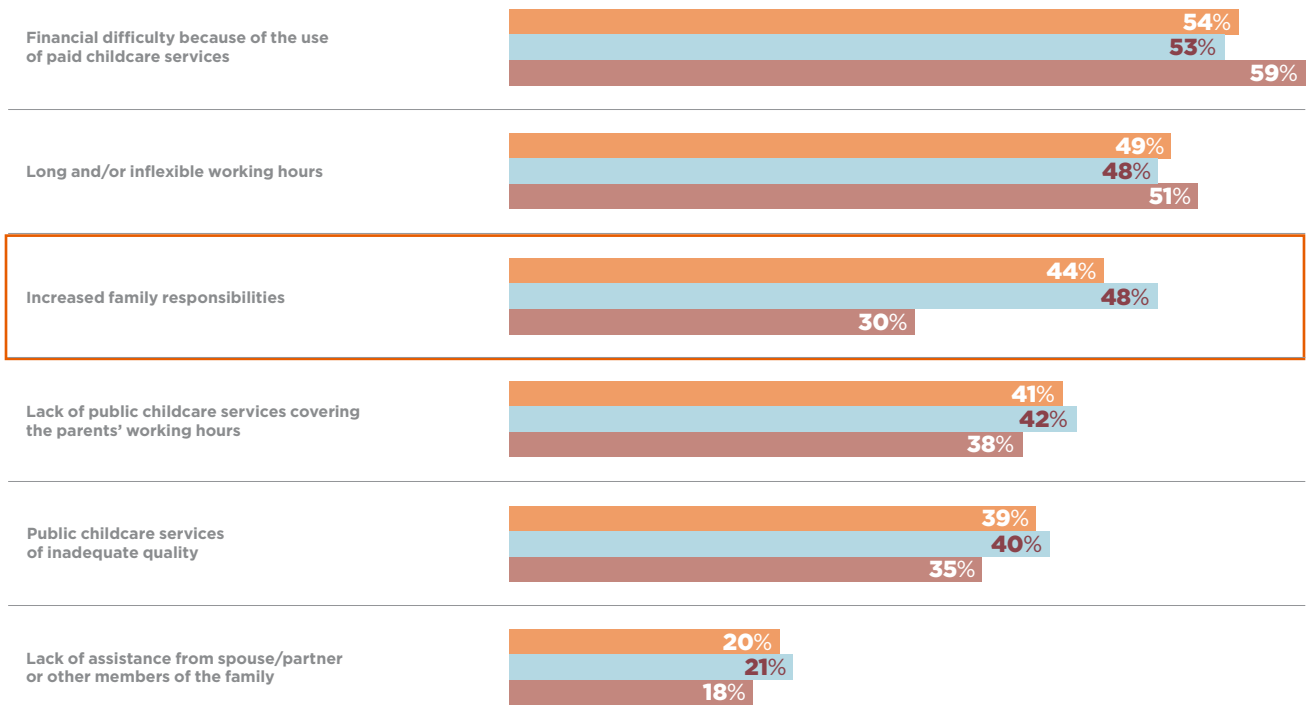
- Woman, 31 years

Moreover, persons who have not yet had children seem to **be more concerned** (compared to persons who are already parents) about the financial difficulties they may face by using childcare services, and then about **their demanding work hours** (Graph 2). Nonetheless, the largest disparity between the views of participants who are already parents and those who plan on having children shortly is reported in relation to their concerns about meeting the numerous family obligations. Parents, because of their everyday experiences, state that the **numerous family obligations** are much more concerning for them, in relation to persons who have not yet had to deal with them.

GRAPH 2

ISSUES CONCERNING PERSONS WITH OR WITHOUT CHILDREN IN RELATION TO WORK/LIFE RECONCILIATION

■ Total ■ Parents ■ Intending to have children



Differentiation by gender is noted when the participants are asked about the problems, they are facing due to work/life reconciliation challenges. Even though during the quantitative investigation both women and men reported the **lack of personal time** as an important consequence, men considered the **lack of quality time with their families** as an equally important consequence, whereas women are found to experience emotional tension, which affects both their family and work roles (Graph 3). This was confirmed through the interviews, when it became evident that women suffer

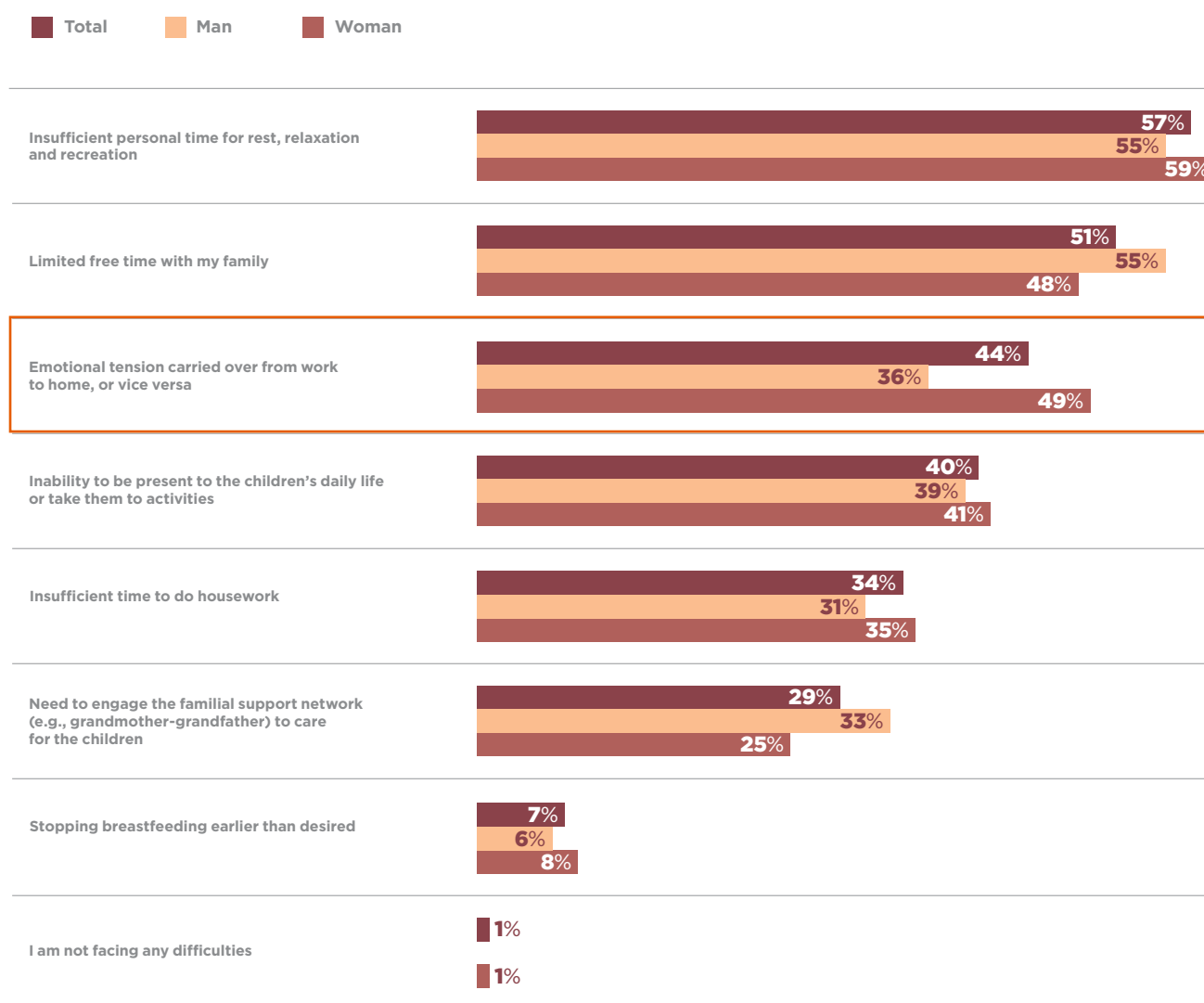
more by the difficulty in **managing their tension and the feelings of guilt, fatigue and irritation** they experience while trying to rise to the demands of the multiple roles they serve:

“You either let down your children or feel you cannot keep up with work. One minute you feel guilty that you do not give enough to your children and the next one you feel guilty... Me, for example, right now, I feel I am behind at work due to maternity leaves, etc.”

- Woman, 39 years

GRAPH 3

PROBLEMS OF WORK/LIFE RECONCILIATION CHALLENGES BY GENDER



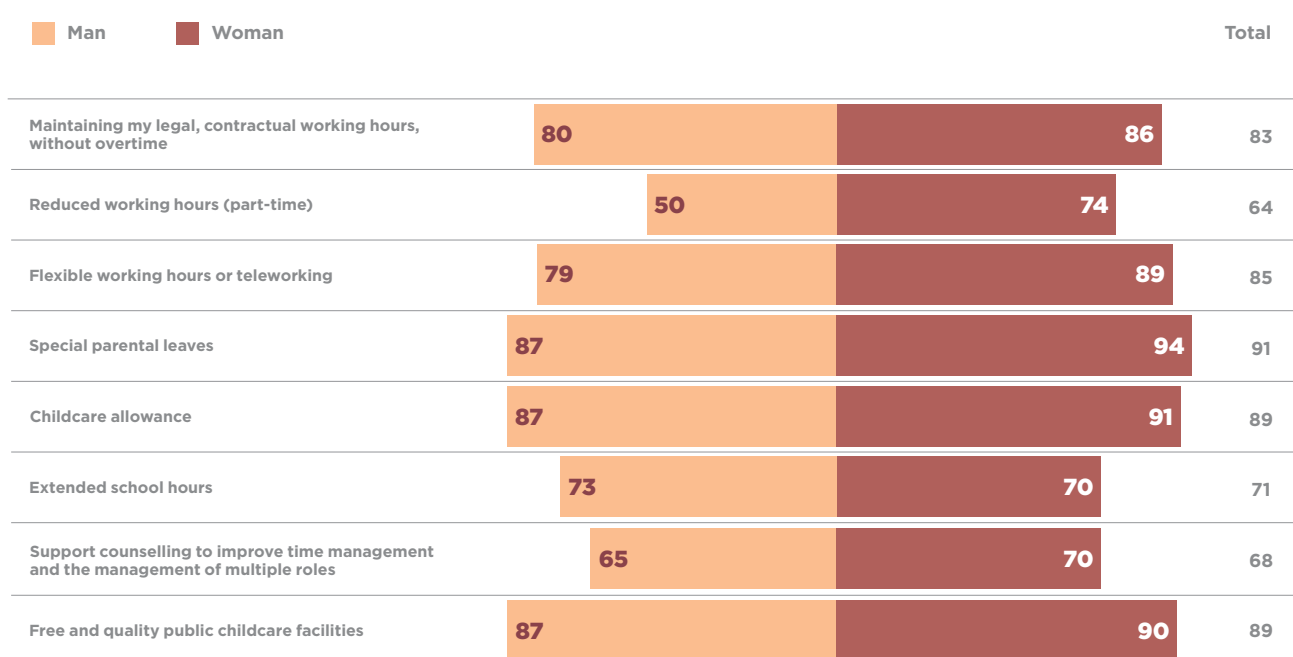
At the same time, the findings in relation to the actual management of free time by men and women is very telling. Equally important is the information on the priorities that men and women pose, based on their personal desires, and needs, or the social mandates. As confirmed through the qualitative investigation interviews, women tend to prioritise their **involvement with the practical needs of their children**, pushing their personal care into the background, whereas men dedicate more time to their work and consequently, as discussed above, feel that the quality time they spend with their families is short. Moreover, it appears that men are **less concerned with meeting the practical needs of their children**, which could be explained either by the fact they feel these needs are being met by others (e.g., the mothers or other family members), or

because they do not recognise or understand them in full, or even because they do not consider them part of their own responsibilities, as defined by their gender social role.

The three measures that are considered more supportive to improve work/life balance are common between the men and women who participated in the quantitative part of the survey: special leaves for parents, an allowance for childcare services, and free, quality, public childcare facilities (Graph 4). It is, nonetheless, interesting that **“reduced working hours” and “flexible hours or remote work”** are the measures where the gender gap appears more prominent, demonstrating that men, as a rule, do not opt for solutions which affect their work status.

GRAPH 4

BY GENDER EVALUATION OF MEASURES FOR PROMOTING WORK/LIFE RECONCILIATION



Moreover, the interviews revealed interesting aspects and proposals regarding the **evaluation of the measures** that the participants had either made use of or that are considered to be helpful based on other parents' experience. For example, one mother mentioned the following:

“They could subsidise the two hours between the time the child leaves the school and the time I leave work.”

- Woman, 37 years

Another female participant mentioned the need to **extend parental leaves** so that at least one of the parents can take care of the child until school age, as well as the need to modify working hours later on, so they are aligned with school hours. In contrast, according to the interviews and the relevant quantitative data (see above Graph 4) the extension of school hours is not considered a helpful or desirable measure, mainly based on children's needs:

“[It does not help] Not at all. The 8-4 [school hours] already seems excessive for a young child.”

- Woman, 36 years

“It is very tiring for the children.”

- Man, 41 years

In terms of evaluating the measure of reduced working hours to promote work/life reconciliation, one mother, through her own experience, reported that it does not offer any meaningful support and **is not desirable due to the financial loss**, especially for the people working remotely:

“I ultimately realised that reduced working hours were not convenient. On the one hand, I wanted to avoid the economic loss, because it meant that I would be working 6 months for 600 euro, it was not enough... and in the end, it is not possible to control your working hours when working from home. It does not offer anything substantial.”

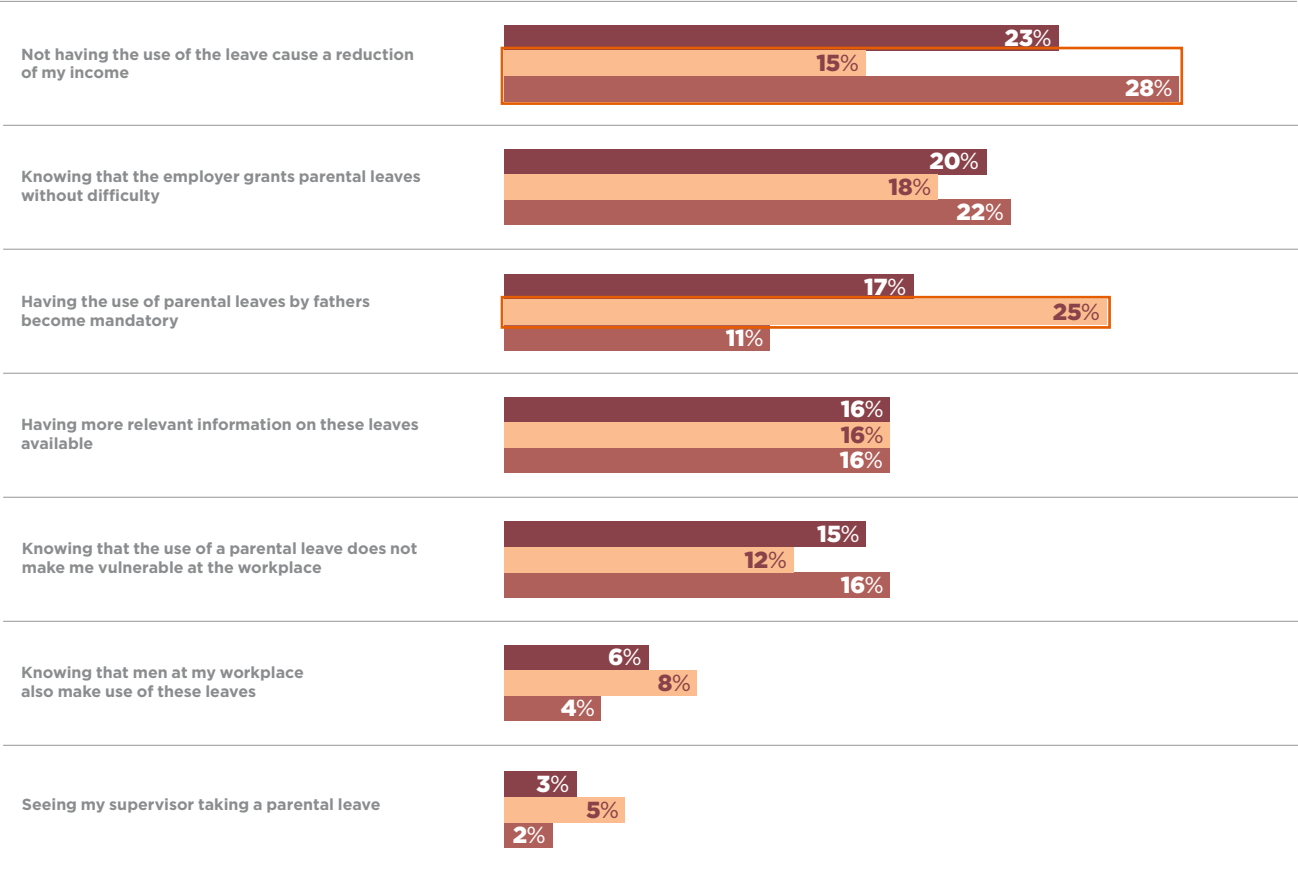
- Woman, 39 years

Given that parental leaves are the main theme of this survey, the participants were called to present their views regarding the ways they would promote the use of said leaves (Graph 5). Considering the data about the use of parental leaves by men, as already presented in Section 3, it should be noted that the men who participated in the quantitative survey reported that the most important measure would be to make parental leaves mandatory for fathers. Even though, as seen from the review of data from other countries, even when parental leaves are not an individual but rather a family right, women use them for a much longer period compared to men, nonetheless, establishing men's mandatory participation is considered a way to enhance men's role in childcare. At the same time, this statement reveals that men are trapped by gender stereotypes and that radical solutions are required in order for them to challenge those stereotypes. On the other hand, female employees when faced with the same question report that the most important measure to promote parental leaves would be for the “leave to not cause an income reduction”, thus highlighting a major consequence they are dealing with.

GRAPH 5

BY GENDER EVALUATION OF MEASURES TO PROMOTE THE USE OF PARENTAL LEAVES

■ Total ■ Man ■ Woman



5.3 | PARENTHOOD AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

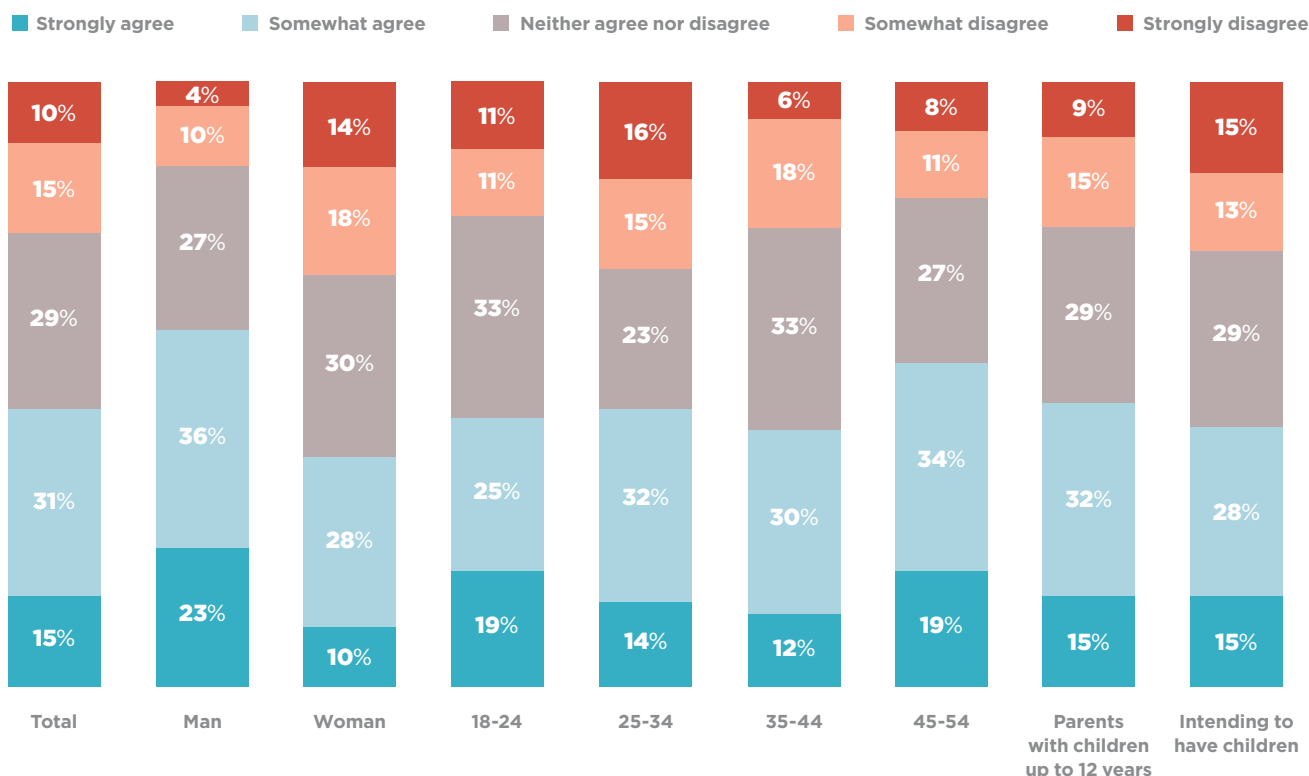
Gender stereotypes, as presented in Section 2, play a decisive role on gender relationships and roles, within and outside the family context, and significantly affect the sharing of care responsibilities within the family. More specifically, **the expectations and corresponding limitations** arising from them are much more prominent in relation to men and women’s parenting roles, the corresponding responsibilities and the ability to be flexible at work to meet family obligations. Therefore, a significant part of the Women On Top research process was aimed at, as already presented, recording the perceptions and attitudes related to the sharing of family obligations based on gender and gender roles in general, which are informing the employees’ decisions in relation to the use of leaves for the protection of the family. Through the data from this survey, in full alignment to the corresponding research findings of previous surveys, it is found, on the

one hand, that **especially for men, use of those leaves is a taboo**, and, on the other hand, the responsibility to care for the children and the home still falls directly on mothers and women, respectively.

To investigate the impact of gender stereotypes on parenthood and also the general sharing of family obligations based on gender, the participants in the quantitative survey were asked to record how much they agree/disagree with a number of statements. More specifically: **38% of women and 58% of men agree or somewhat agree with the view that the labour market “penalises” men who make use of parental leaves** (Graph 6). In fact, the total percentage increases for persons falling into the 45-54 age group, showing that older persons are more likely to be faced with gender stereotypes and/or their responses are informed by their relevant life experiences.

GRAPH 6

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: THE JOB MARKET “PENALISES” MEN WHO MAKE USE OF PARENTAL LEAVES

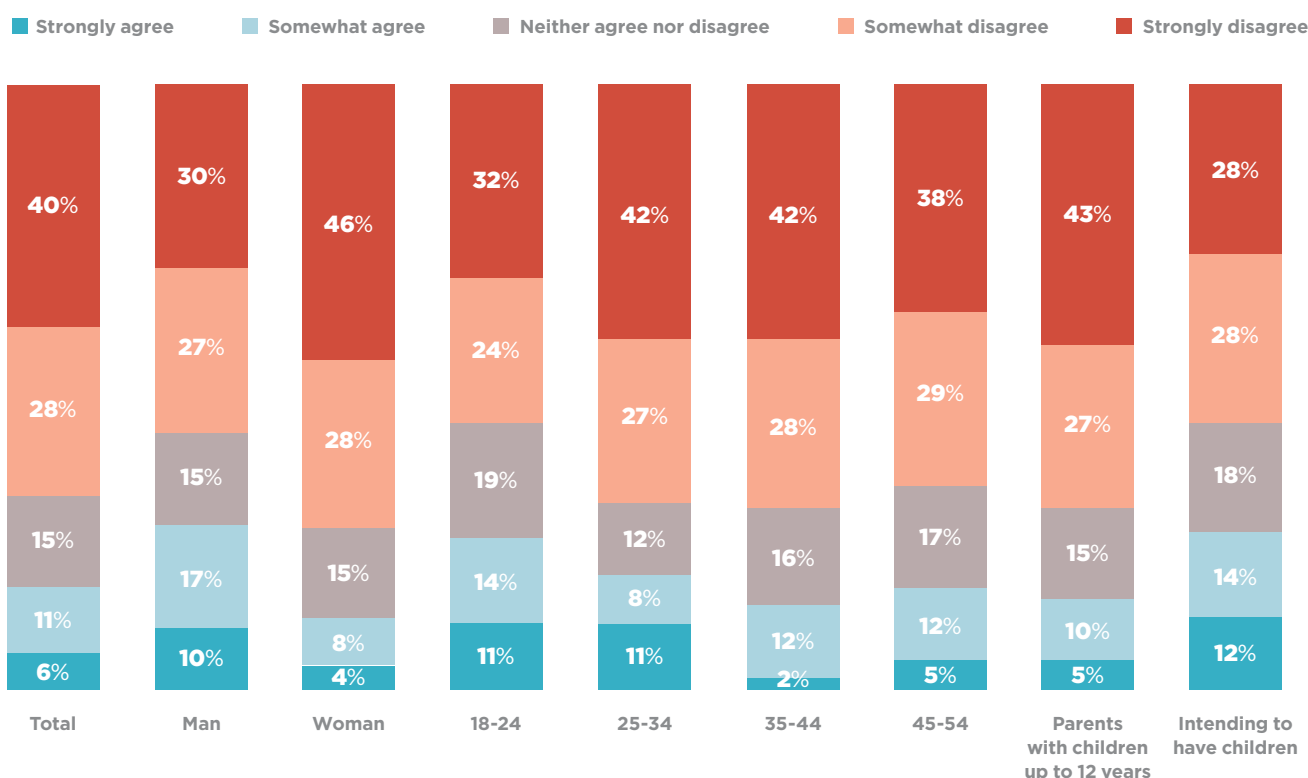


The treatment of the men who choose to challenge gender biases, and the role of fathers in general were the subject of investigation through a series of additional questions. In more detail, considering the statement “if a male colleague were to take parental leave, I would feel he is harming his career”, 28% of men in the sample noted they agree or somewhat

agree (Graph 7). The corresponding percentage is significantly lower among women (10%), whereas it should also be noted that **1 in 4 persons planning on having children agrees with this statement**, further highlighting the need to raise awareness on matters of work/life reconciliation, putting emphasis on the role of the fathers.

GRAPH 7

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: IF A MALE COLLEAGUE WERE TO TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE, I WOULD FEEL HE IS HARMING HIS CAREER

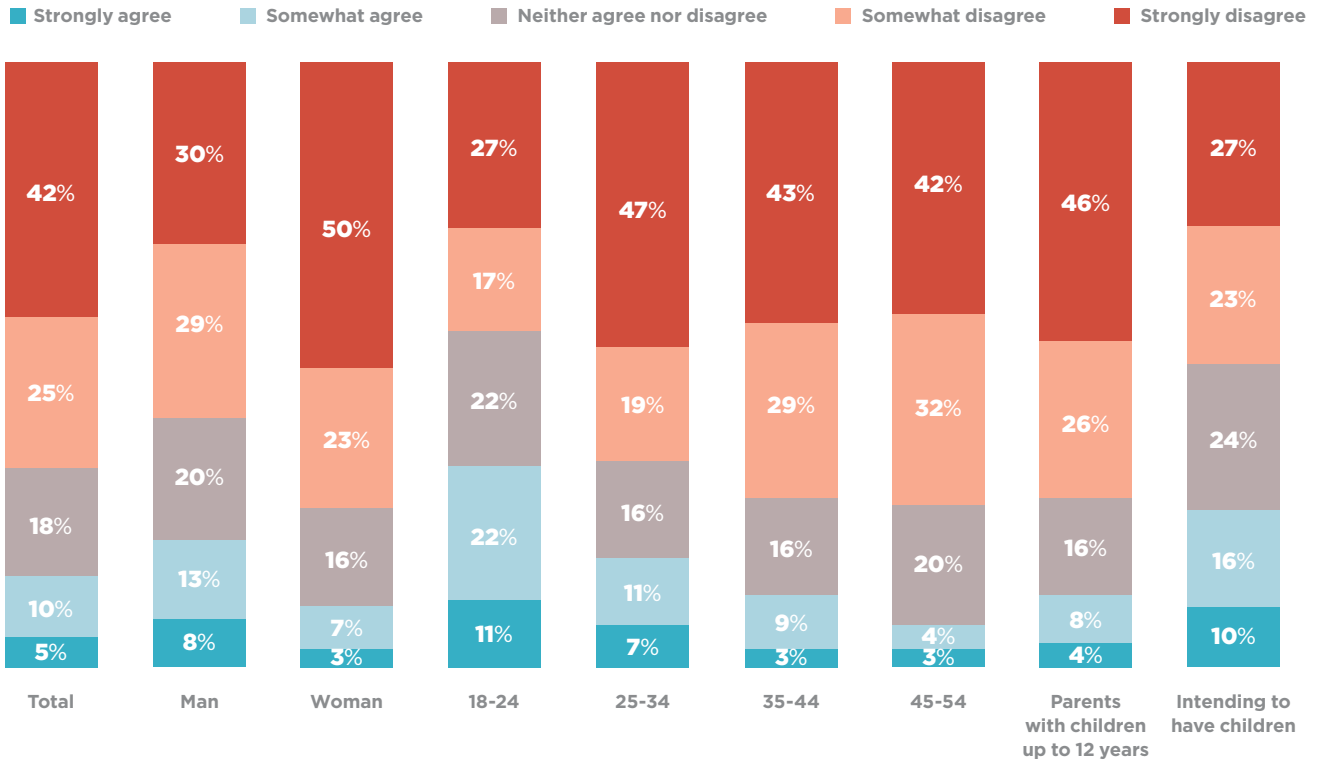


In the same context, 10% of women and 21% of men in the quantitative survey sample believe that **men who use multi-day parental leaves are not sufficiently committed to their careers** (Graph 8). This figure increases significantly among young people aged 18-24, where 1 out of 3 persons agrees or somewhat agrees with the view suggesting that the fathers' non-use of parental leave is a sign of work commitment, reinforcing the relevant **gender biases** which remain dominant.

Similarly, 8% of women and 24% of men think (agree or somewhat agree) that if a male supervisor were to take parental leave, this would indicate his is less committed to his work duties (Graph 9). Even though it is often said that role models can have a positive impact on the rejection of gender stereotypes, this is not confirmed through the quantitative survey and the answers of the men in the sample. It is, however, important to note that **the use of anti-stereotypical images and examples serves mainly as an intervention against unconscious biases**.

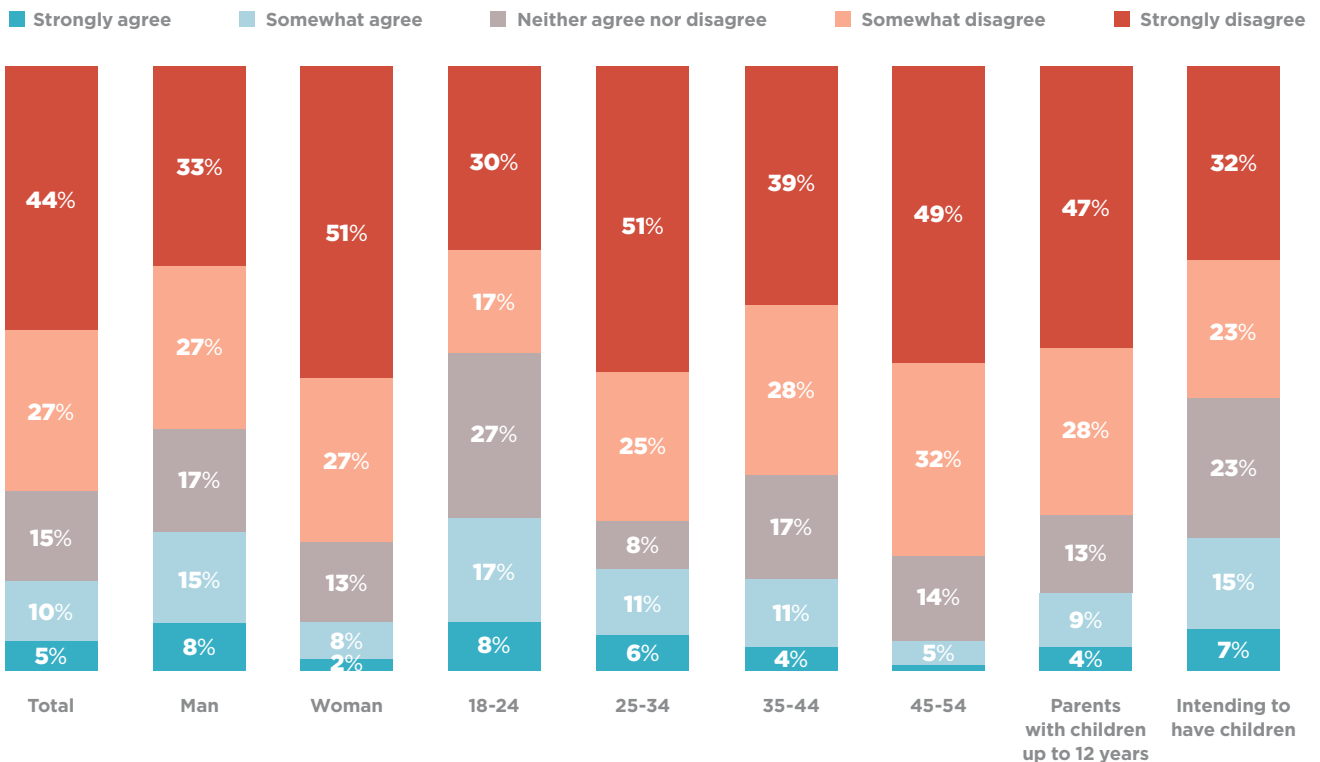
GRAPH 8

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: MEN WHO USE MULTI-DAY PARENTAL LEAVES ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY COMMITTED TO THEIR CAREERS



GRAPH 9

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: IF A MALE SUPERVISOR WERE TO TAKE PARENTAL LEAVE, THAT WOULD INDICATE HE IS LESS COMMITTED TO HIS WORK DUTIES



Similar views and beliefs, analysed and presented in Graphs 6, 7, 8 and 9, appear to weigh heavily on the choices of the men who participated in the qualitative investigation. For example, in relation to taking or not an extended leave (over 14 days), most participants reported that “they cannot” be absent from work for such an extended period of time because they **will be seen as less committed**, whereas others could not clearly justify the reasons for which they do not make use of such leaves. When asked the reason why he cannot request parental leave, one of the fathers was very clear:

“[Name of wife/partner] attempted to put the issue on the table, but yes, it is difficult to request this [parental] leave. To say I will take 3 months off? It is rather difficult to request it [laughs]. I don’t know why. Something is stressing me.”

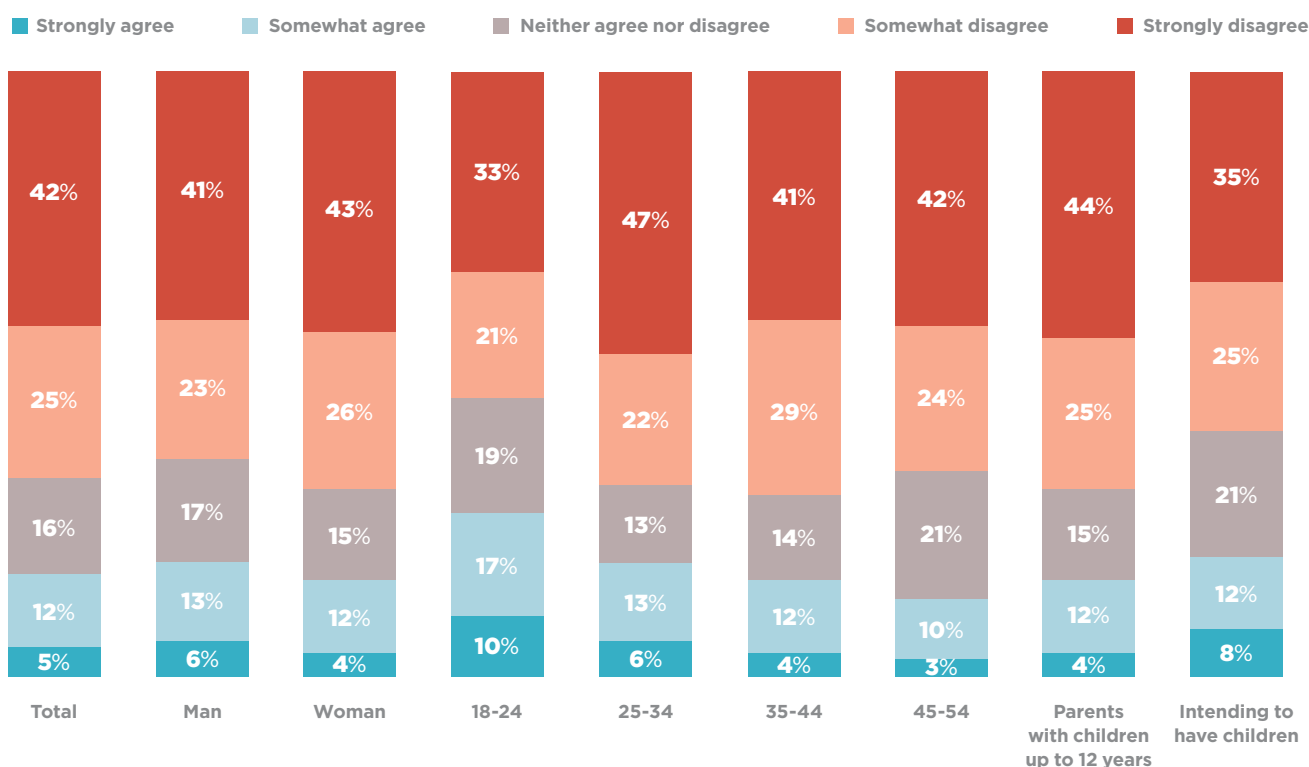
- Man, 41 years

Complementing the previous statements, the agreement of the women in the sample (15%) to the statement that men cannot properly care for the children increases, as seen in Graph 10. Nonetheless, the percentage of men who agree or somewhat agree with this statement is significantly lower compared to the previous statements. For instance, as we have seen (Graph 7) 28% of men feel that the uptake of parental leaves by men harms their careers, but a significantly smaller percentage, only 19%, agrees with the statement that challenges men’s ability to care for their children. **This distinction shows how gender stereotypes tend to overlook the skills that do not support the specified gender roles.**

Moreover, 36% of women and 30% of men believe (agree or somewhat agree) that men are more interested in their careers compared to women (Graph 11). The percentage (34%) of people who agree or somewhat agree with this statement, irrespective of their gender, is the same between parents and non-parents.

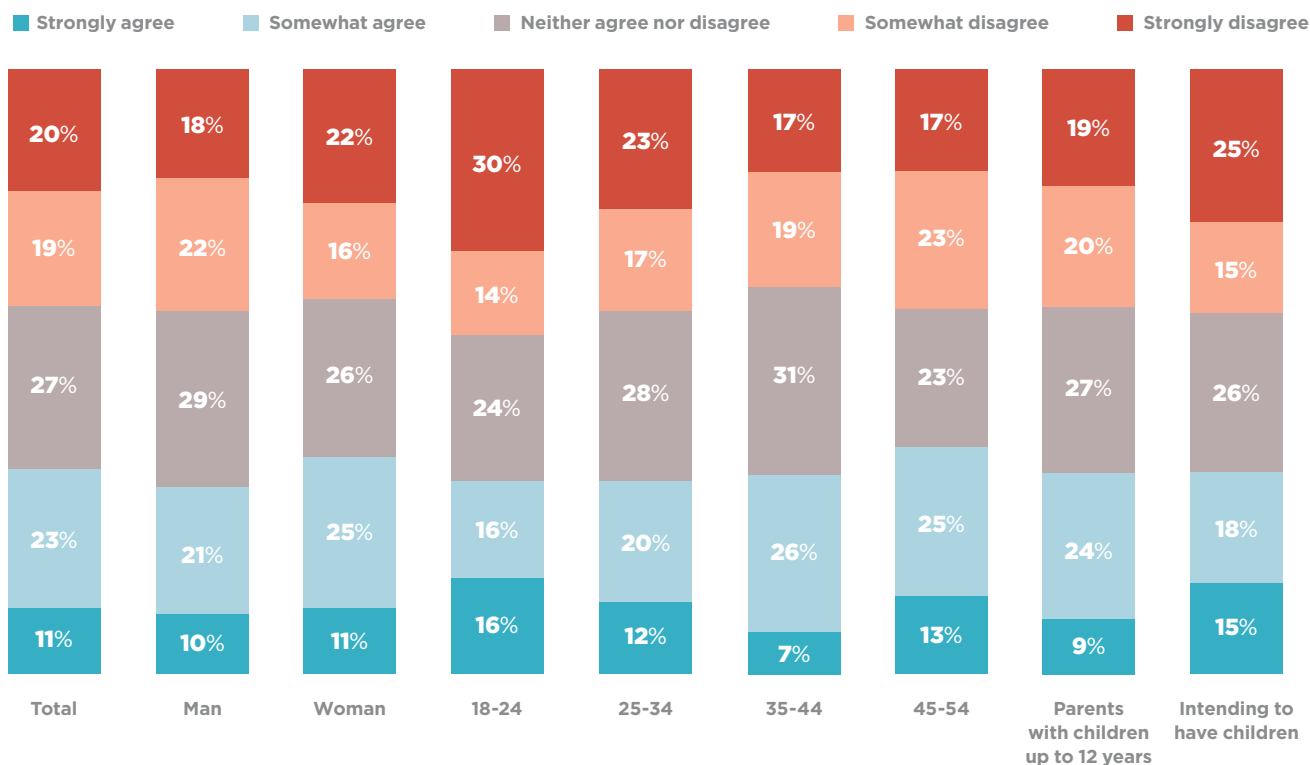
GRAPH 10

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: MEN CANNOT PROPERLY CARE FOR CHILDREN



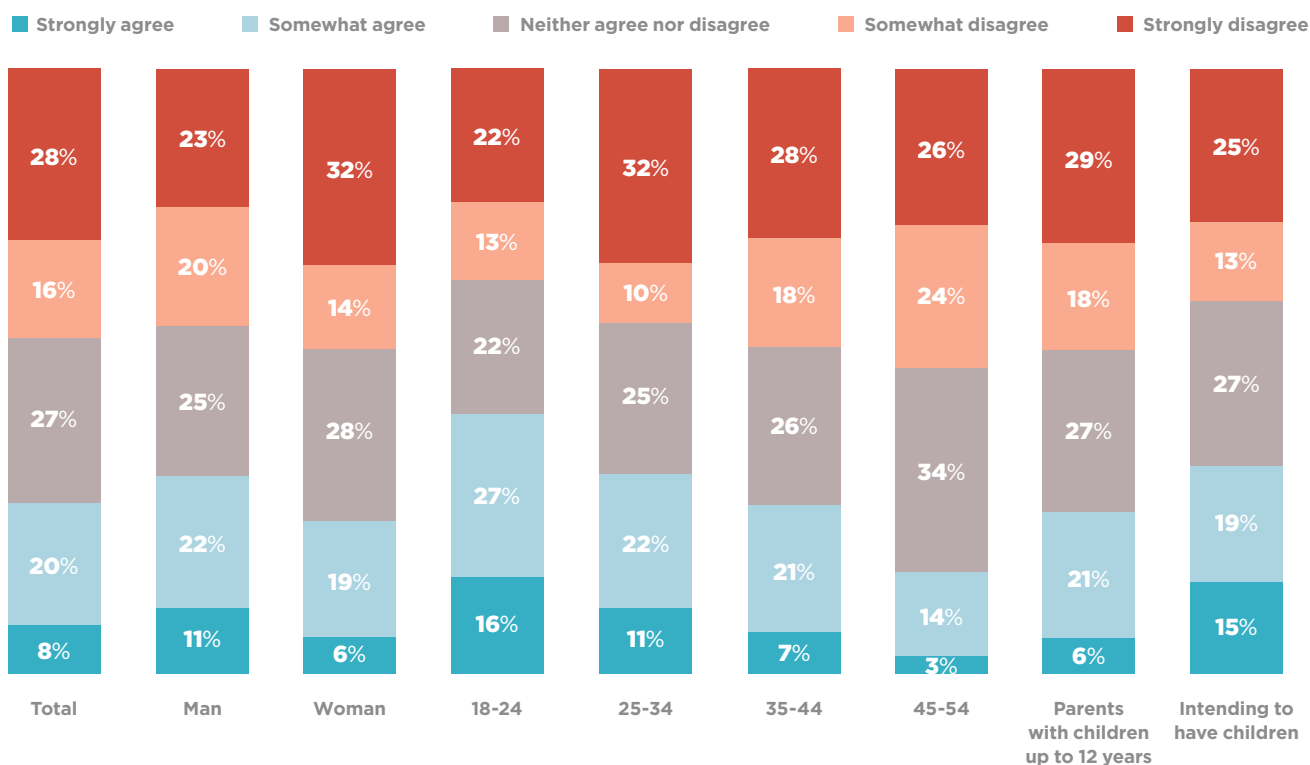
GRAPH 11

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: MEN ARE MORE INTERESTED IN THEIR CAREERS COMPARED TO WOMEN



GRAPH 12

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: MEN SHOULD SUPPORT THE FAMILY AND WOMEN SHOULD WORK TO SUPPLEMENT THE FAMILY INCOME

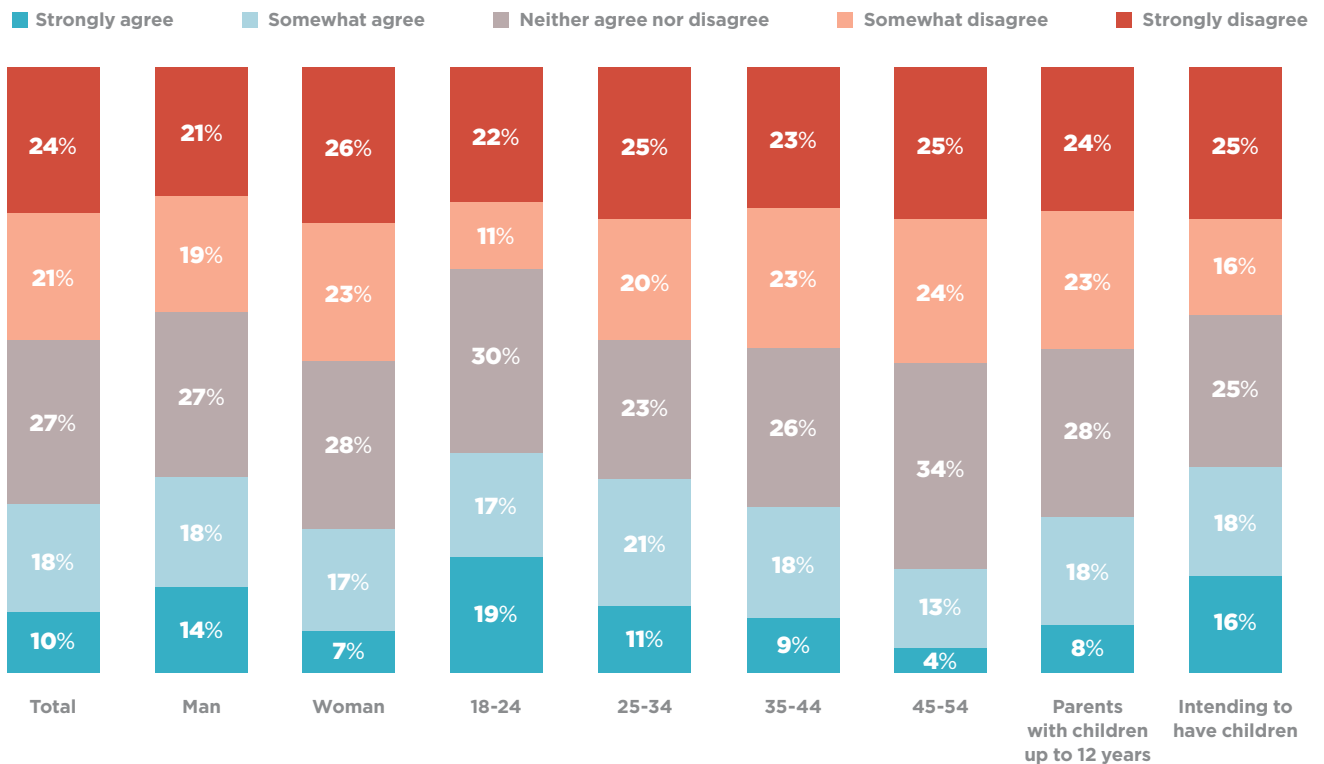


In terms of the statement that **men should support the family and women should work to supplement the family income**, 26% of women and 33% of men are in agreement (Graph 12). What is noteworthy here is the fact that the degree of agreement drops along as the age of the respondents increases, demonstrating that **stereotypical views in relation to gender roles are extremely popular among younger people**. It is telling that more than 4 out of 10 participants aged 18-24 agree or somewhat agree with the above statement.

In addition, 24% of women and 32% of men agree or somewhat agree with the view that women should adapt their lives to the family needs (Graph 13). As in the previous statement, it appears that the younger the respondents, the greater the degree of agreement. However, in this case, there is significant disparity noted depending on the parental status of the respondents. More specifically, persons who already have one or more children agree to a lesser extent in relation to persons who are not yet parents, with the view that women have a duty to adapt their choices based on the needs of their family.

GRAPH 13

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: IT IS WOMEN'S DUTY TO ADAPT THEIR LIVES TO THE FAMILY NEEDS

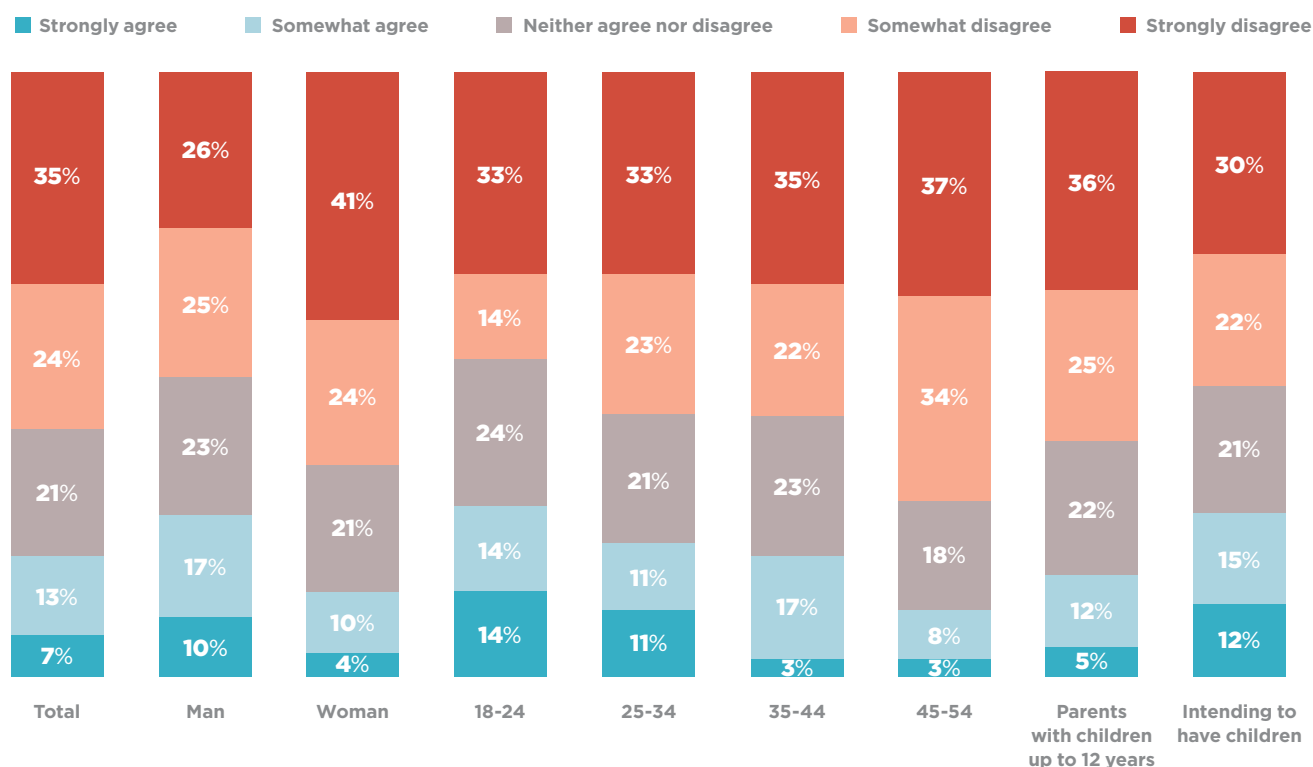


With regard to the statement “women should be responsible for housework”, 15% of women and 27% of men stated they agree or somewhat agree (Graph 14), showing yet again, same as above, a significant disparity in men’s and women’s stance towards similar views,

depending on which category is affected more by each statement. In line with the majority of the cases already presented, **age and parental status play a part in defining the sample’s degree of agreement.**

GRAPH 14

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: WOMEN SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR HOUSEWORK



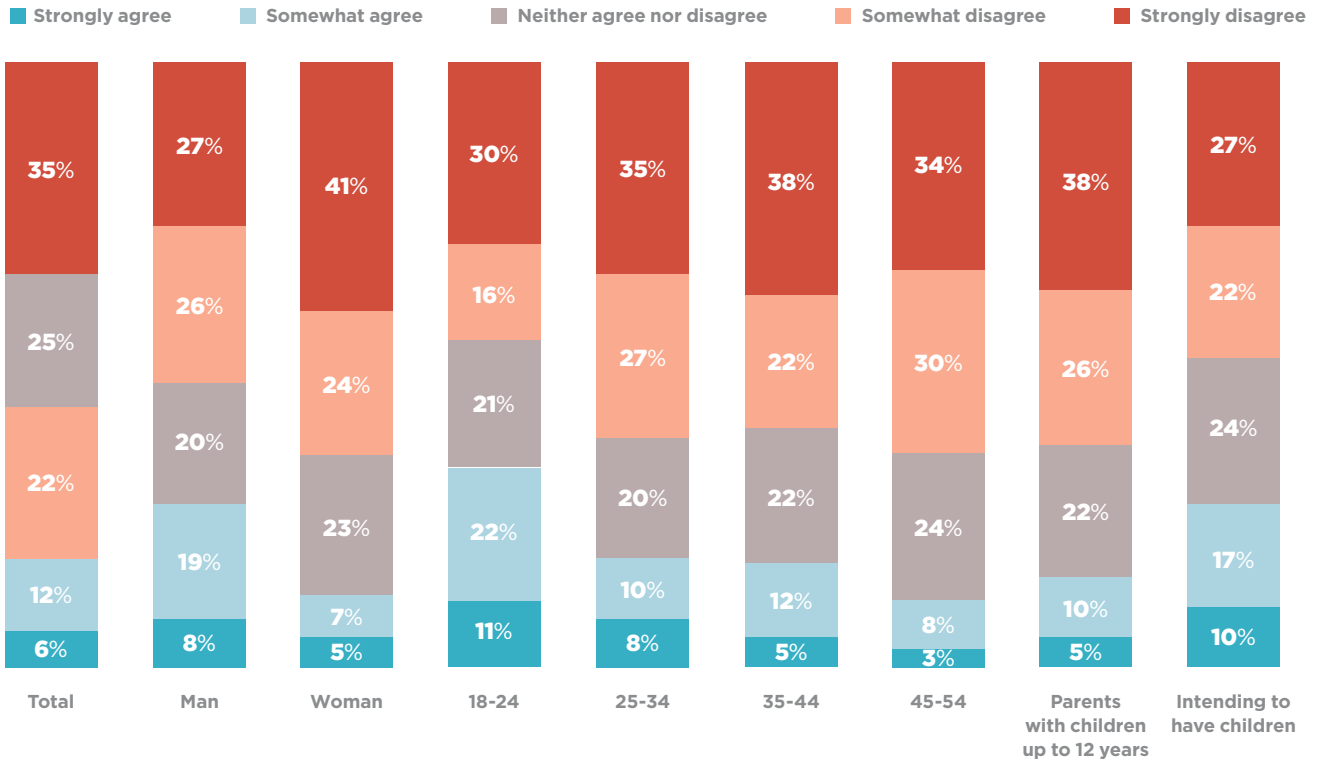
12% of women and 27% of men stated they agree or somewhat agree with the view that when both parents work, women should be responsible for childcare (Graph 15). The fact that approximately 1 out of 10 women in the sample agrees with this statement is in stark contrast to research data, and the data collected through couples’ interviews for this study, showing that effectively, women, **irrespective of the employment status of their husbands/partners**, are the main caregivers for their children. However, as seen in Graph 15, the agreement rate increases significantly among

persons aged 18-24 years: 1 out of 3 people in this age group adopt a positive stance towards the view that working women should be exclusively tasked with childcare.

In the last of the statements used to investigate the stance of the sample towards a series of stereotypical beliefs, 13% of women and 20% of men agreed or somewhat agreed with the view that **working mothers cannot be as caring as women who do not work** (Graph 16).

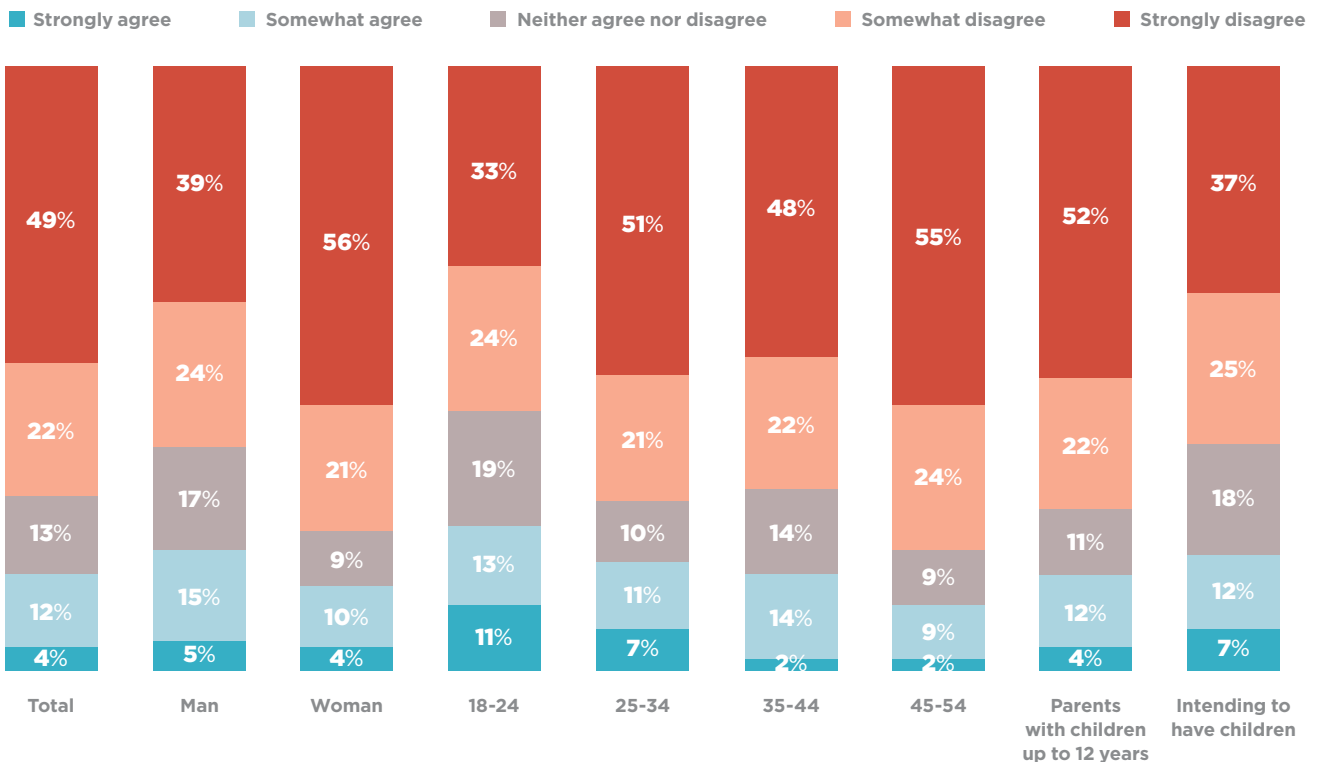
GRAPH 15

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: WHEN BOTH PARENTS WORK, WOMEN SHOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILDCARE



GRAPH 16

PER GENDER, AGE GROUP AND PARENTAL STATUS DEGREE OF AGREEMENT/DISAGREEMENT WITH THE STATEMENT: WORKING MOTHERS CANNOT BE AS CARING AS MOTHERS WHO DO NOT WORK



Whereas with all above statements the majority of participants in the quantitative survey reported they do not support views that perpetuate gender stereotypes, the fact that a significant number of participants does not challenge them is troubling. In fact, younger generations, men and those who declared their intention to have children in the near future appear to **accept those stereotypes to a greater extent, whereas older persons appear to challenge them more**. It is also surprising that men who have used some type of parental leave embrace the aforementioned stereotypes at higher rates; it is clear that this trend must be further investigated.

Nonetheless, those views that are adopted by a minority of the participants in the quantitative survey, appear to be more popular in practice based on the responses of the participants during the qualitative investigation of different work/life reconciliation aspects. More specifically, interviews with couples of working parents revealed that the responsibility for childcare and housework in general, in the context of gendered sharing of responsibilities, falls on the women, **even when work hours or professional demands are the same among the couple**.

“There’s lots to do with the children. But [name of wife/partner] does most of it. Clearly.”

- Man, 41 years

“It is not equal [our contribution to housework], but it not entirely one-sided either. We have found a balance to work with.”

- Man, 34 years

Moreover, in questions asked during the interviews, some couples attributed the tendency to preserve gender specific roles not to expressed beliefs but to unconscious habit:

“I had the sense that everything went through me, from cooking up to the car washing.”

- Woman, 32 years

“I vocalised the pressure I was under and [name of husband/partner] took action. It is not that he was slacking off before, but he didn’t take initiative. And I didn’t want to be giving directions.”

- Woman, 32 years

5.4 | FAMILIARITY WITH AND USE OF PARENTAL LEAVES: CONSEQUENCES AND BENEFITS

The level of information and knowledge of those potentially entitled to the leaves in relation to their options, the terms and the conditions included in the institutional frame for parental leaves is a major factor affecting their uptake. To this end, capturing the degree of familiarity with and use of these leaves was one of the main research objectives, both during the quantitative and qualitative approach of the subject.

One of the most important findings of the quantitative survey is that the level of knowledge regarding the contents of parental leaves and conditions that apply to them in general is relatively low for all participant groups, even for the parents in the sample. Moreover, it is telling that when answering interview questions, men, mostly, even those who are fathers, stated in multiple ways: **“I have no clue what I am entitled to.”**

PARENTAL LEAVES IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR ANALYSED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study places the focus of the investigation on 4 leaves that have been adopted in the framework for the protection of the family,⁶⁵ out of which: one is addressed exclusively to men/fathers, one is addressed exclusively to women/mothers and two to any working parent or person holding parental responsibility, irrespective of gender. These are the following:

PATERNITY LEAVE⁶⁶

14-day leave for working fathers, to be taken at or in the first months after childbirth (up to 30 days after birth)

SPECIAL MATERNITY PROTECTION BENEFIT⁶⁷

6-month leave for working mothers, to be taken after childbirth

CHILDCARE LEAVE⁶⁸

Leave granted in the form of reduced work hours, reduced work days per week or as consecutive leave days, to one of the two parents.

PARENTAL LEAVE⁶⁹

Leave (personal and non-transferrable) for any employed parent or person holding parental responsibility, with a 4-month duration, which can be used at once or in blocks, until the child becomes 8 years old, for the purpose of meeting minimum childcare requirements.

65 All leaves adopted for the protection of the family can be found here: <https://www.hli.gov.gr/ergasiakes-scheseis/nomothesia-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-gia-tin-prostasia-tis-oikogeneias/> (in Greek)

66 <https://www.sepe.gov.gr/ergasiakes-scheseis/nomothesia-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-gia-tin-prostasia-tis-oikogeneias/adeia-patrotitas/>

67 <https://www.sepe.gov.gr/ergasiakes-scheseis/nomothesia-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-gia-tin-prostasia-tis-oikogeneias/eidiki-parochi-prostasias-mitrotitas/>

68 <https://www.sepe.gov.gr/ergasiakes-scheseis/nomothesia-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-gia-tin-prostasia-tis-oikogeneias/adeia-frontidas-teknou/>

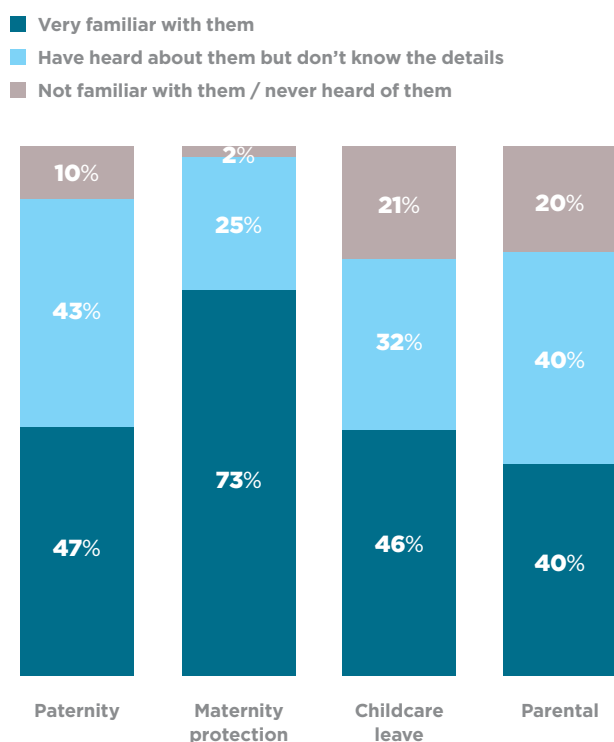
69 <https://www.sepe.gov.gr/ergasiakes-scheseis/nomothesia-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-ergasiakes-scheseis/adeies-gia-tin-prostasia-tis-oikogeneias/goniki-adeia/>

The **maternity protection leave** seems to be the one that the great majority of participants (73%) is familiar or rather familiar with (Graph 17). The qualitative investigation interviews revealed that this applies to all maternity related leaves. Even those persons who do not have children yet, have at least a general knowledge about these leaves, mainly because they share information with other mothers from their work environment. It appears, in other words, that the expanded use of these leaves **also benefits the diffusion of information** surrounding them. On the other side, the

level of information/familiarity is lowest when it comes to parental leaves, as 20% of quantitative survey sample stated they are not familiar with it at all (Graph 17). With the exception of the maternity protection leave, for which women clearly are better informed than men according to their answers (76% of women stated they are well familiar with this leave, whereas the corresponding percentage among men is 68%), the degree of familiarity with the rest of the leaves under review does not show significant gender differentiation.

GRAPH 17

DEGREE OF FAMILIARITY WITH PARENTAL LEAVES



With regard to the **uptake of parental leaves**, the findings related to their use by men are extremely interesting. More specifically, as seen in Graph 18, 47% of the participating fathers responded they have not used any kind of parental leave. The same Graph shows that the leave more frequently used by fathers is the paternity leave, a leave exclusively reserved for them. Even so, **only 34% of men stated they have made use of the paternity leave**. The corresponding percentage for the parental leave is 27%. It should also be noted that out of the men who responded they have used their paternity leave, 69% had done so before 2021 when the relevant law was amended (i.e., when the leave duration was only 2 days, **instead of the 14 laid out** in Law 4808/2021). In relation to the previous, short duration of the paternity leave, one of the participants in the qualitative part of the survey noted:

“With our first child, the leave I had taken was very short. What good are 4 days? It’s nothing. I had supplemented it using my regular leave to stay longer at home.”

- Man, 41 years

To the question “Which of the following reasons were mainly responsible for your decision to take the leave?”,⁷⁰ addressed to those who have used the paternity leave, most participants (58%) stated they have made use of the leave to support their wife/partner (Graph 19). Along these lines, one of the fathers who participated in the qualitative survey noted:

“This leave is for helping the mother, I was not ready to take over; if you were to give me the child and leave, I wouldn’t know what to do.”

- Man, 38 years

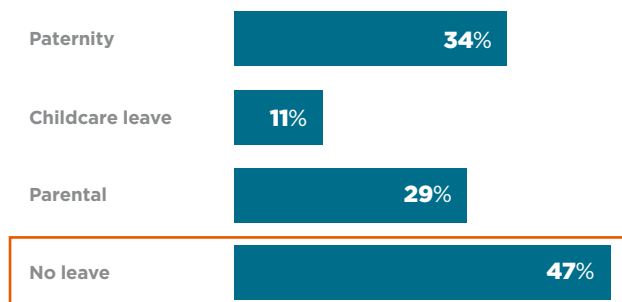
Moreover, some participants responded that they took the paternity leave because of their own personal need to stay (even for 2 days) at home as parents (54%) and their desire to dedicate more time to the newest member in their family (50%). Another important factor is the idea that they have to take advantage of the ability/right to take the leave (since I am entitled to it, I will use it) (Graph 19).

70 The participants were asked to select up to 2 of the choices seen in the Graph.

71 The participants were asked to select up to 2 of the choices seen in the Graph.

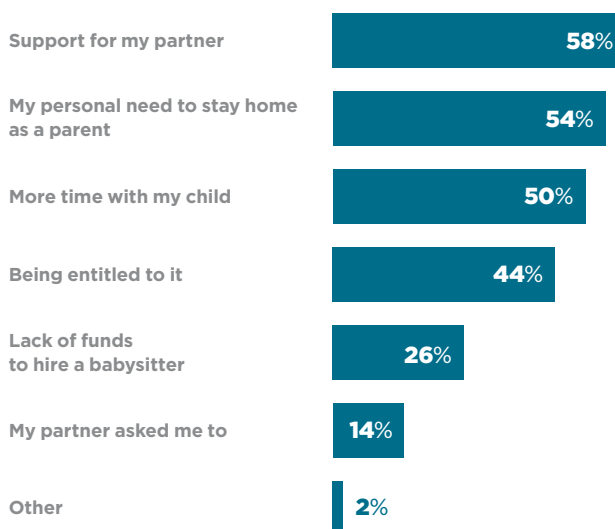
GRAPH 18

USE OF PARENTAL LEAVES BY FATHERS



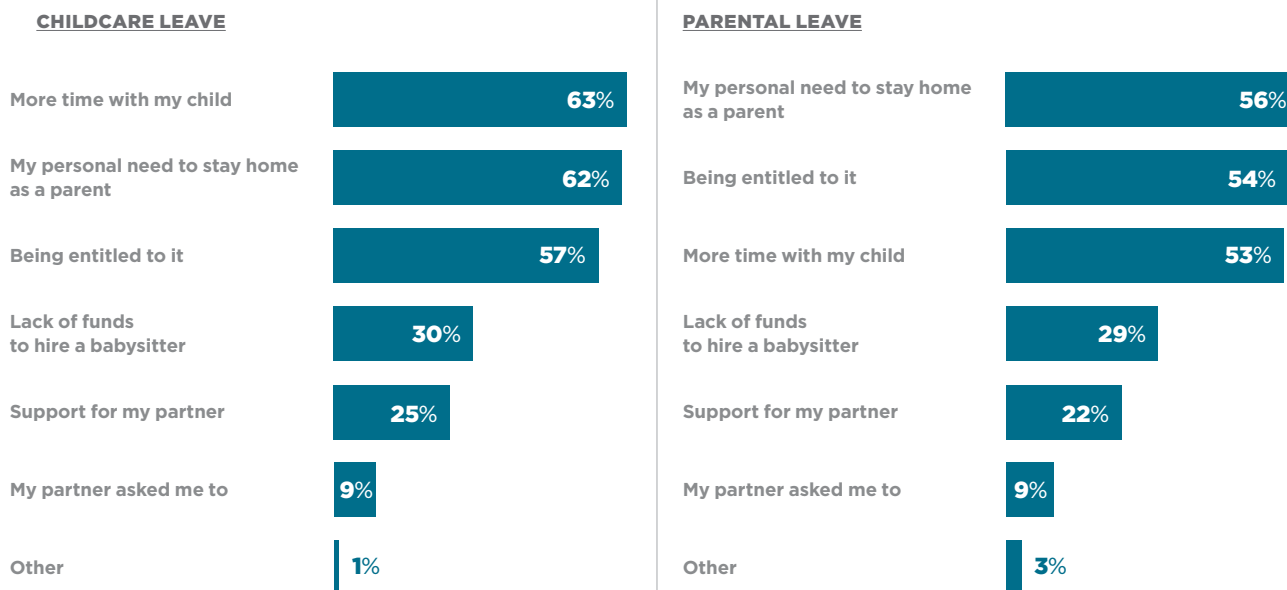
GRAPH 19

MAIN REASONS FOR TAKING A PATERNITY LEAVE



GRAPH 20

MAIN REASONS FOR USING CHILDCARE LEAVE AND PARENTAL LEAVE

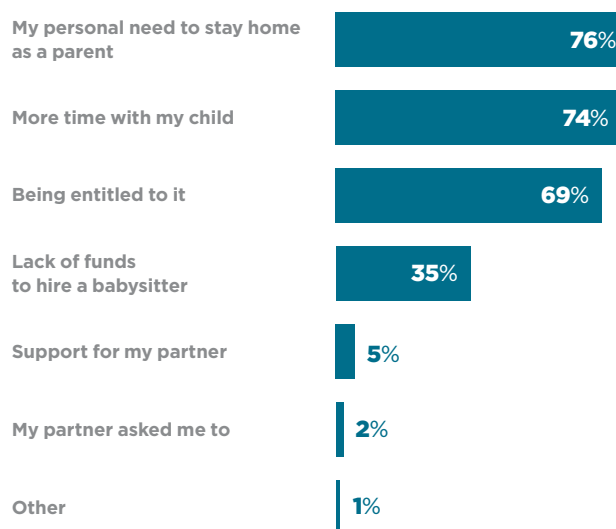


Graph 20 shows the main reasons for using the 2 leaves that can potentially be taken by either parent: the childcare leave and the parental leave.⁷¹ As regards the childcare leave, the main reasons are: more time with the child (63%); a personal need to stay home as a parent (62%); and making use of the entitlement (57%). As regards the parental leave, the main reasons leading parents to use it are: a personal need to stay home as a parent (56%); making use of the entitlement (54%) and more time with the child (53%).

For women, **the reasons for using the maternity protection benefit** do not vary significantly compared to the 2 leaves presented in Graph 20. There is, however, a difference in the ranking and the percentages corresponding to each choice (Graph 21).⁷² Specifically, the personal need to stay home as mothers (76%) and need to spend more time with their child (74%) are clearly more important reasons for them to use this benefit. Compared to the corresponding leave which is reserved exclusively for fathers (paternity leave) (Graph 19), the reasons why mothers used the leave/maternity protection benefit appear to be more associated with their **roles as mothers**, whereas for men, **supporting the wife/partner** seems to be the main moti-

GRAPH 21

MAIN REASONS FOR TAKING THE SPECIAL MATERNITY PROTECTION BENEFIT



vation. This conclusion confirms the view that fathers play a “complementary” role in child raising. This view is strengthened and perpetuated by the fact that some benefits in the institutional framework are disproportionate between fathers and mothers.

72 The participants were asked to select up to 2 of the choices seen in the Graph.

In Section 2 of this Report, we noted that modern research activity on parental leaves attempts to examine the benefits of using them, focusing on the positive impact from the uptake of paternity leaves and the increase of the father’s involvement in childcare. Along the same lines, the Women On Top study included among its objectives the identification of the consequences (positive and/or negative) related to the choices of working parents on the use of leaves for the protection of the family.

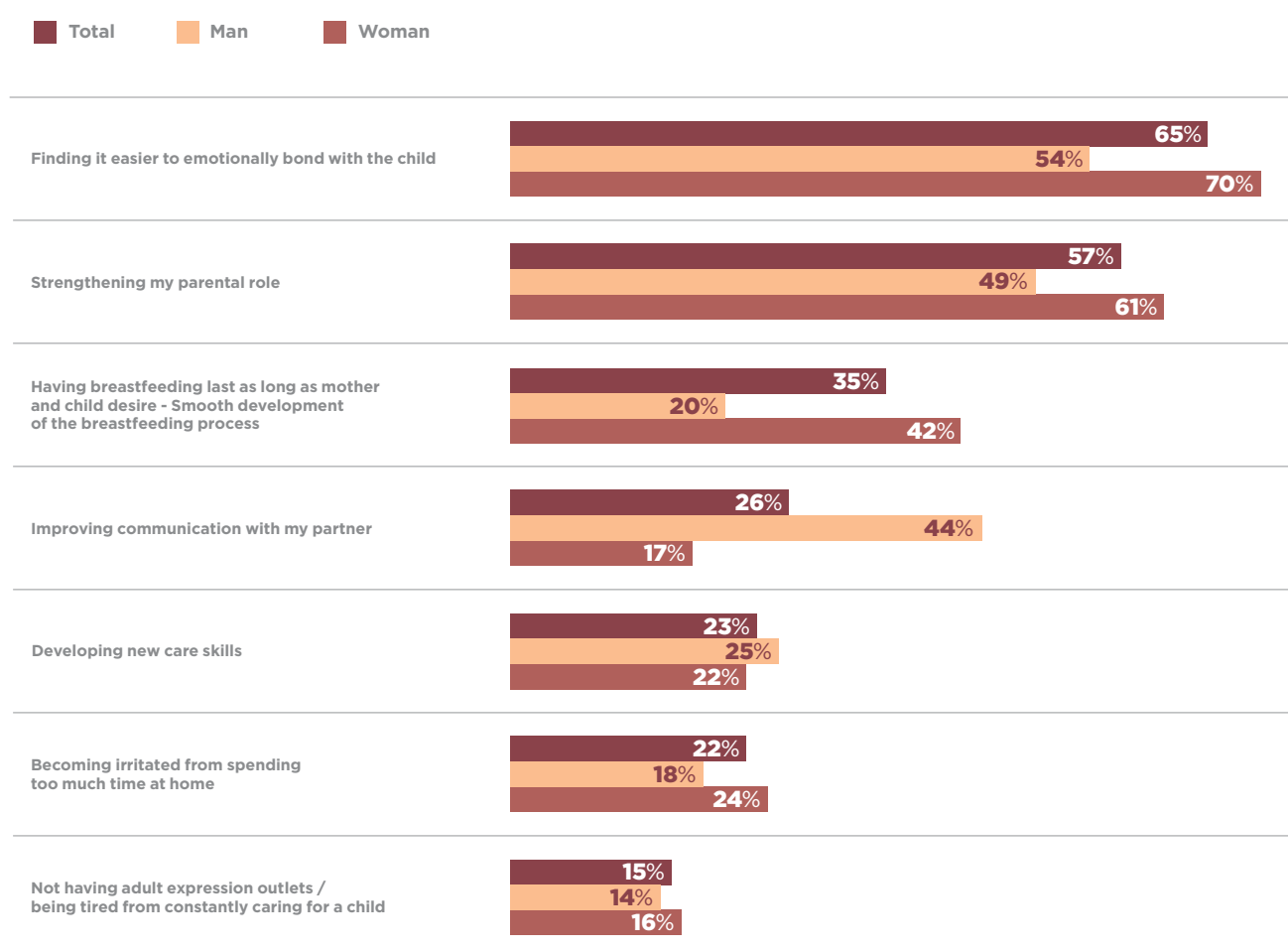
Most of the parents (men too, but mostly women) that have used some type of parental leave, mainly report the **positive consequences this had on their personal lives** (Graph 22). The most important of those positive consequences was the easier bonding with the child and strengthening of their parental role (65%). The ad-

vantages identified by most men are improved communication with their partner due to their stay at home, and the development of new skills related to care. These findings are in line with the corresponding findings of other research (see Section 2) where it was determined that the uptake of paternity leaves facilitates father-child bonding and also has a positive impact on new mothers. With regard to enhancing the presence at home, one father noted that using the leave helped him be present and support his wife/partner, in line with what was presented above about the, per gender, reasons for taking parental leaves:

“It helped my as a partner to be there for [name of wife/partner] who was overwhelmed. I felt useful.”
 - Man, 38 years

GRAPH 22

PER GENDER POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES ON PERSONAL LIFE RESULTING FROM THE USE OF PARENTAL LEAVES



The **negative consequences**, on a personal level, resulting from the use of a leave (being irritable because of spending too much time at home, not being able to express oneself as an adult, and being tired from constantly taking care of a child) are less prominent, especially for men, possibly because of the short duration of the leaves they usually take and men's smaller involvement with childcare (Graph 22):

“At first the father has to be home to take care of both, but the majority of men do not want to be too involved. They feel it's best they keep some distance. They want to continue with their lives.”

- Man, 41 years

The short duration of the leaves mostly taken by men may also be the reason why 25% of those who have taken some leave report that it had no consequence, neither positive nor negative for their professional lives (Graph 23). Other than that, the professional consequences from the use of parental leave, is reported by men and women as **mainly negative**.

Namely, as presented in Graph 23, the negative comments from people at the work place are equally troubling (27%) for men and women who have used a leave:

“I have heard many things about women who get pregnant during their first months at a job, mainly from other women.”

- Woman, 36 years

“Anybody can take time off work. The point is the feeling you get from the general atmosphere.”

- Man, 41 years

However, women appear to suffer more from the difficulty to adjust to their work environment after taking a leave, and from the negative shift in their supervisors' attitude towards them or even from the negative change of role or grade after their return.

Some female participants noted during the interviews:

“In case of pregnancy, they would easily replace me with someone else, and when I returned I would not have the same responsibilities.”

- Woman, 34 years

“When I had a child it is as if they told me ‘that’s as far as you go’, subtly but clearly.”

- Woman, 39 years

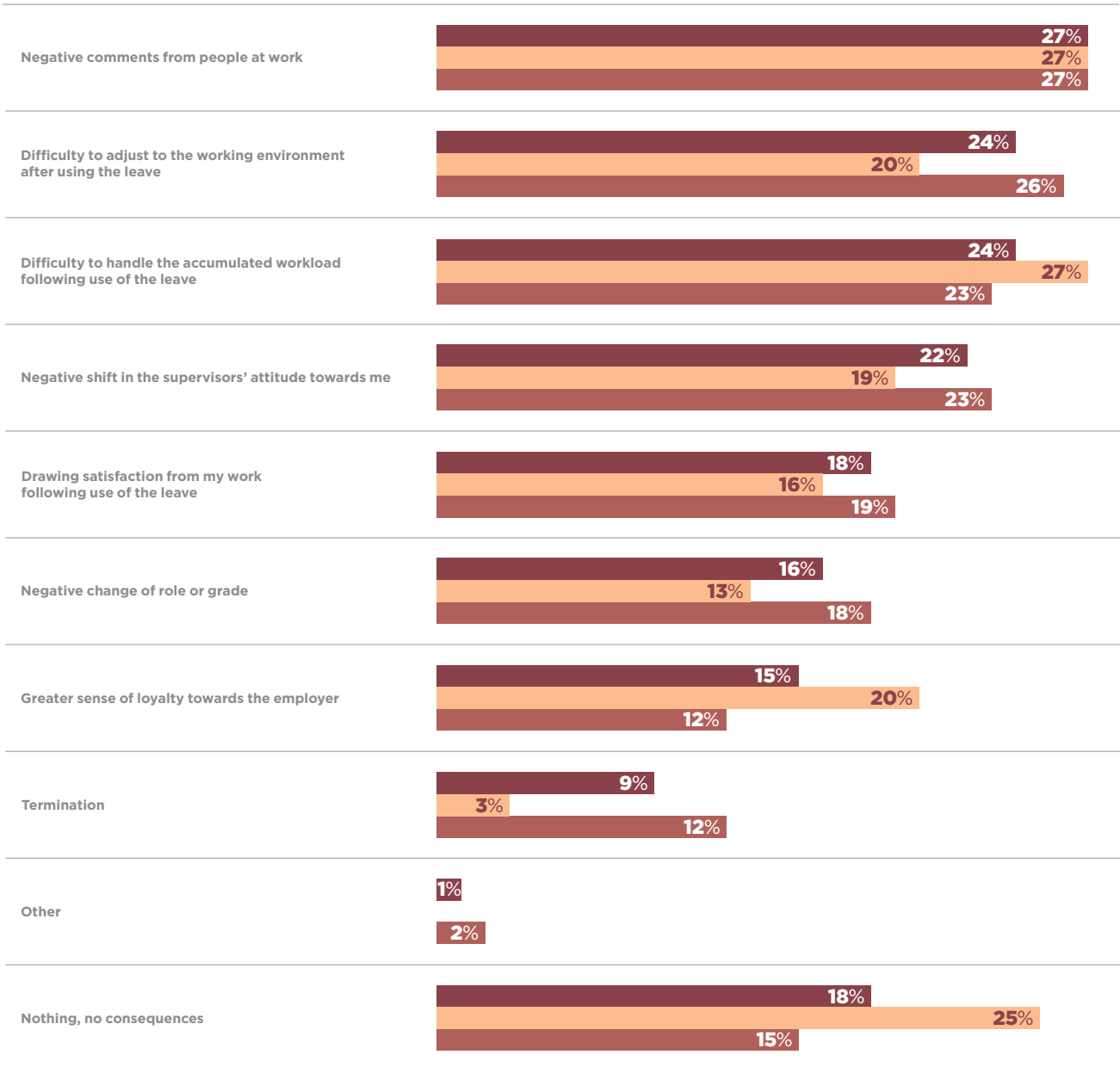
These consequences are very likely tied to the longer duration of the leaves taken by mothers compared to the leaves taken by men.

After the leave, **men are also more affected** by their difficulty in managing the work load due to their absence, possibly because, due to the short duration of the leave, normally their employers do not delegate their duties to others. Men also report, at a larger percentage (20%), one of the few positive consequences at the workplace, related to a strengthening of their sense of loyalty to their employer, possibly because of a **feeling of gratitude** for being able to use a benefit which is not yet considered as a given for fathers.

GRAPH 23

PER GENDER POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES ON PROFESSIONAL LIFE RESULTING FROM THE USE OF PARENTAL LEAVES

■ Total ■ Man ■ Woman



As presented above, the benefits from using parental leaves include **the development of skills related to childcare**. Nonetheless, the relevant literature identifies a wider range of skills improved through the parents', mothers and fathers, active engagement in raising and caring for their children. More specifically, Section 2

included examples of research focuses, capturing and highlighting a series of skills developed in the context of fulfilling the demanding requirements for the role of a working parent. Therefore, in our research too, the study of the skills developed during the use of parental leaves was an object of interest.

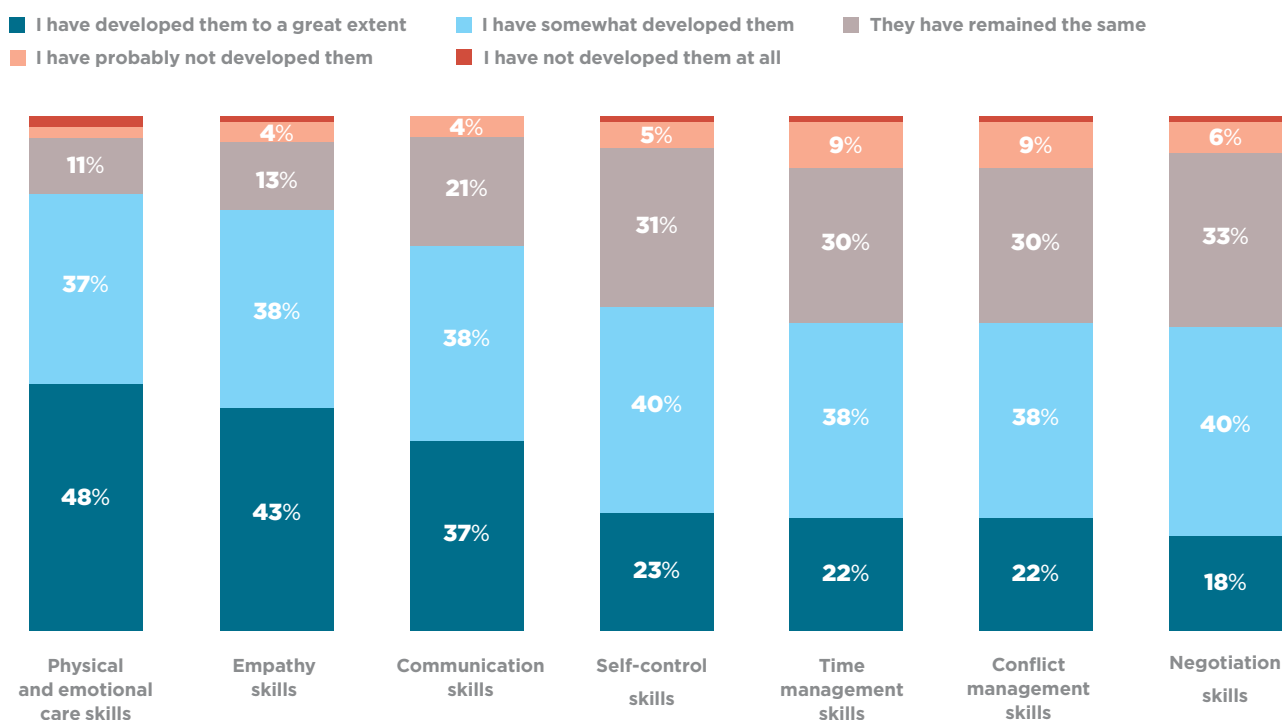
As noted in the following Graph, the question regarding the skills potentially developed by participants during a period of absence from work due to parental leave, gave rise to some interesting answers from the men and women who have made use of some type of parental leave.

More specifically:

- 84% of men and 86% of women reported they developed **physical and emotional care skills**
- 77% of men and 83% of women reported they developed **empathy skills**
- 77% of men and 73% of women reported they developed **communication skills**
- 56% of men and 65% of women reported they developed **self-control skills**
- 63% of men and 61% of women reported they developed **time management skills**
- 63% of men and 59% of women reported the developed **conflict management skills**
- 56% of men and 60% of women reported they developed **negotiation skills**.

GRAPH 24

DEGREE OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT (PER SKILL) DURING THE LEAVE PERIOD



5.5 | NON-USE OF PARENTAL LEAVES: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

In order to carry out the most thorough investigation possible on the aspects of gendered sharing of care responsibilities, aside from capturing the degree of familiarity with and use of parental leaves, it would be useful to analyse **the dimensions related to their non-use**. Therefore, the survey included questions related to the reasons and the positive and negative consequences associated with the decisions of persons who have not used any of the parental leaves under review, even though they were entitled to do so.

To the question **“Which of the following reasons was/were mainly responsible for your decision to not take a paternity leave?”**,⁷³ the men who did not use the leave report mainly the following reasons (Graph 25):

- My partner made use of her leave
- I had too much work
- I did know I had the option
- I would have faced negative judgement by my supervisors

The first reason points back to the deeply rooted social stereotypes that “absolve” men from being involved in childcare, and which stereotypes we presented above in detail by investigating the stance of the respondents towards a series of statements. The fact that most men did not use their paternity leave because their wives/partners had taken some other type of parental leave demonstrates that when there is no direct and urgent practical need for them to take over childcare, i.e., when there is some other person (usually the wife/partner) that is willing or forced to undertake the task, even alone, **they do not see a need to participate on more equal terms in fulfilling the family obligations associated with caring for their children**.

The second reason for not using the paternity leave underlines the different expectations and mandates that society poses on mothers and fathers respectively (often internalised by the persons themselves): **even**

today, it is highly unlikely that a new mother would ever use the argument regarding work responsibilities. The question worth raising is how would a woman be treated if she were to put forward her professional obligations as a reason for not taking maternity leave?

The third reason is directly associated with the **degree of familiarity with and information on the contents and conditions of parental leaves**, as presented in the previous sub-section. Other reasons stated by fathers for not using their paternity leave include: making a negative impression to their supervisors; being afraid of being fired or having a smaller income; making a negative impression to their colleagues; and having difficulties adjusting back to work after the leave:

“If your job is at risk or if you work in an environment that has no tolerance for it, for sure you will be discouraged and try to protect yourself.”

- Man, 34 years

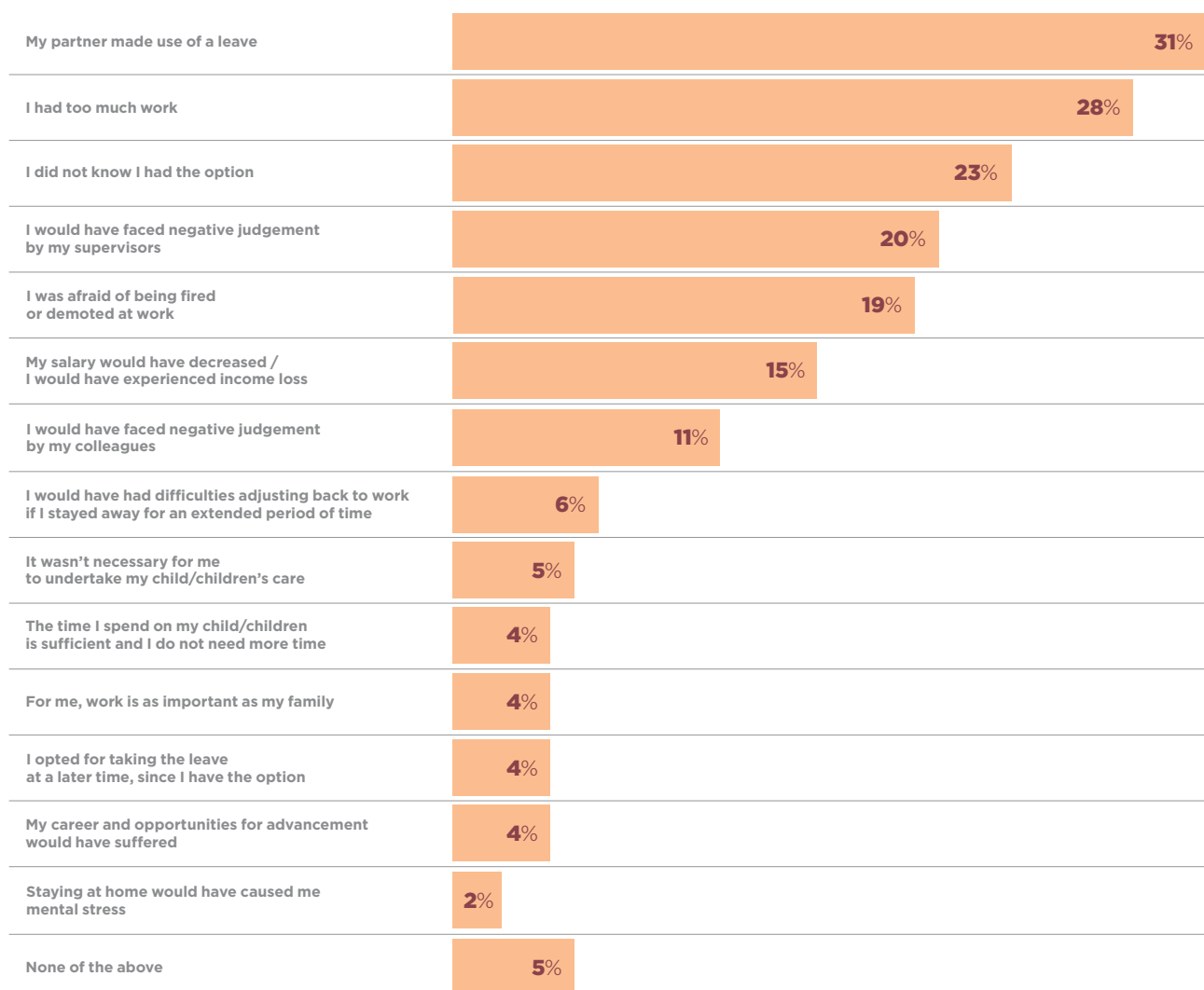
It should be mentioned that the above reasons for not using a paternity leave refer to a period of 2 or (as of 2021) 14 days of absence from work. This suggests that either some reasons for not taking a leave (e.g., reasons tied to the dominant gender expectations and stereotypes about the father’s role), are not easily acknowledged and expressed by men or that their limited understanding about parental leaves creates a false idea about what each leave entails. Both possibilities are heavily supported by the fact that, for men, the responses concerning the reasons for not using a childcare leave (Graph 26) and a parental leave (Graph 27) are similar.⁷⁴ As discussed, these are leaves that can also be taken by mothers and have a longer duration. It should also be mentioned that in the case of the two leaves that either parent can alternatively take, both the men and women who did not use them stated as their main reason for doing so the **lack of information concerning the institutional frame for these leaves**.

⁷³ The participants were asked to select up to 5 of the choices seen in the Graph.

⁷⁴ The participants were asked to select up to 5 of the choices seen in the Graphs.

GRAPH 25

MAIN REASONS FOR NOT USING PATERNITY LEAVES



An additional dimension related to the reasons for not using parental leaves emerged through the interviews that were carried out. More specifically, there were interviewees who noted that they did not request a childcare leave for **fear of being marginalised** at work:

“They would not give it to me gladly; they would do it moaning and groaning, and I would have become the black sheep.”

- Man, 38 year

“I am not comfortable doing it because they would mind [employers].”

- Man, 41 years

This **fear of being stigmatised**, which is associated with gender stereotypes and factors at the workplace (e.g. job insecurity, abusive environments, inhibiting culture), in many cases also applies to mothers; as a result, couples often have to seek alternative solutions for childcare, placing a financial or moral burden on themselves or their families, in order to avoid requesting the use of their enshrined entitlement.

“It is all a question of how, it is not just about the right. I am not someone who goes after something just because I am entitled to it.”

- Man, 38 years

GRAPH 26

MAIN REASONS FOR NOT USING A CHILDCARE LEAVE PER GENDER

	MEN	WOMEN
I did not know I had the option	29%	27%
My salary would have decreased / I would have experienced income loss	23%	19%
I had too much work	23%	13%
I was afraid of being fired or demoted at work	16%	18%
I would have faced negative judgement by my supervisors	18%	11%
My partner made use of a leave	27%	4%
I opted for taking the leave at a later time, since I have the option	11%	9%
I would have faced negative judgement by my colleagues	10%	4%
My career and opportunities for advancement would have suffered	8%	5%
I would have had difficulties adjusting back to work if I stayed away for an extended period of time	5%	5%
The time I spend on my child/children is sufficient and I do not need more time	7%	3%
I was not employed	0%	8%
For me, work is as important as my family	5%	2%
It wasn't necessary for me to undertake my child/children's care	3%	3%
Staying at home would have caused me mental stress	5%	2%
None of the above	5%	23%
Other	2%	3%

GRAPH 27

MAIN REASONS FOR NOT USING A PARENTAL LEAVE PER GENDER

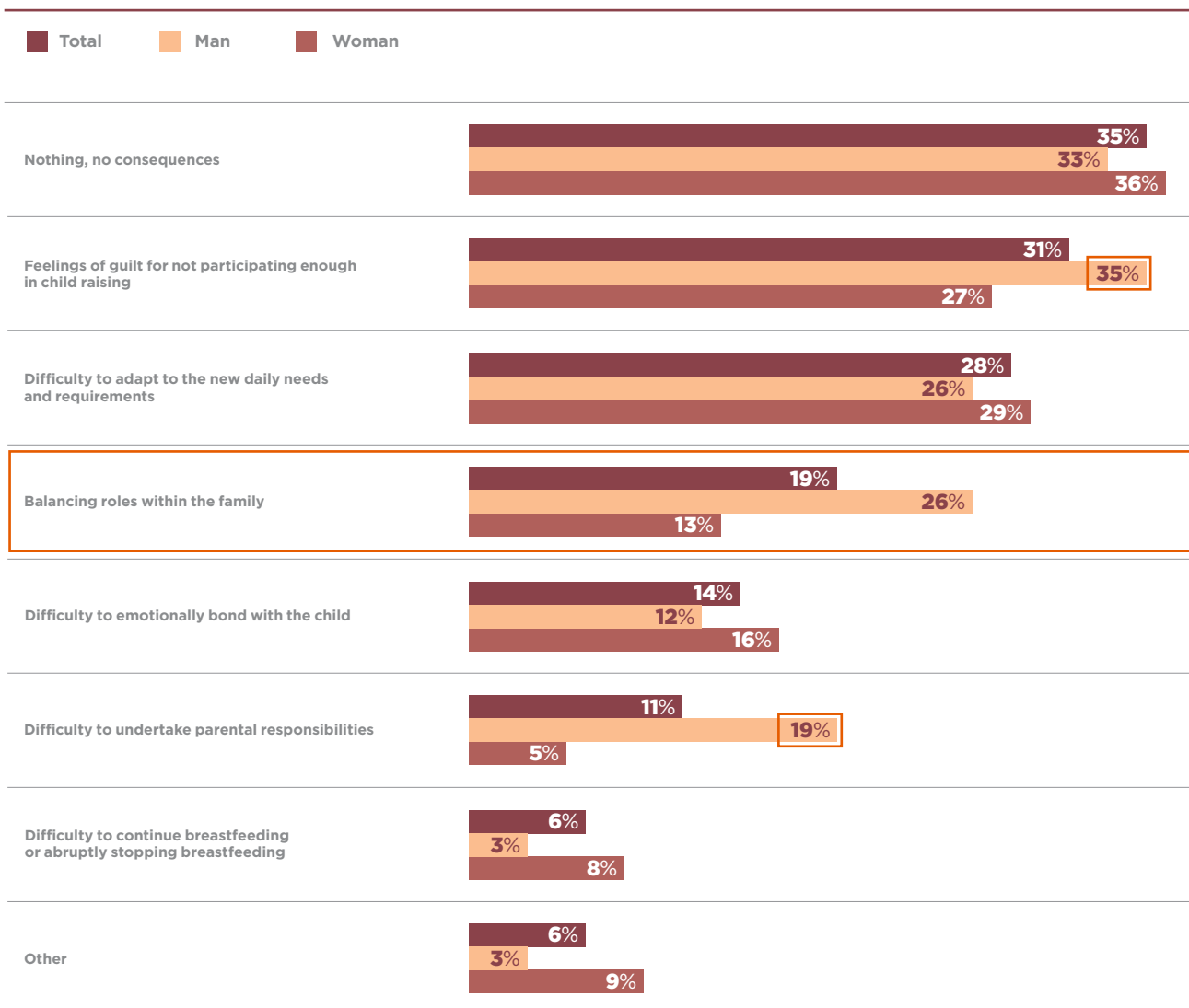
	MEN	WOMEN
I did not know I had the option	24%	27%
My salary would have decreased / I would have experienced income loss	27%	19%
I was afraid of being fired or demoted at work	17%	17%
I would have faced negative judgement by my supervisors	21%	12%
My partner made use of a leave	24%	6%
I had too much work	20%	8%
I opted for taking the leave at a later time, since I have the option	8%	14%
I would have faced negative judgement by my colleagues	11%	8%
I would have had difficulties adjusting back to work if I stayed away for an extended period of time	9%	4%
The time I spend on my child /children is sufficient and I do not need more time	6%	4%
For me, work is as important as my family	9%	2%
Staying at home would have caused me mental stress	6%	2%
My career and opportunities for advancement would have suffered	4%	2%
It wasn't necessary for me to undertake my child / children's care	4%	2%
Other	2%	2%
None of the above	9%	24%

With regard to the consequences of their decision not to use one of the leaves under review, the majority of the persons who have not taken a parental leave feel that this decision did not have any impact on their personal lives (Graph 28). The persons who acknowledge that this “choice” had an impact note the following as the negative consequences (in this order): experiencing feelings of guilt due to their limited involvement in

raising the child; having difficulties in adjusting to the new needs and demands of the daily life; having difficulties in taking responsibility for their parental role and having difficulties in emotionally bonding with the child. Specifically for men, the main negative consequence reported is the **feeling of guilt due to their absence**, whereas for women, the most common consequence is the **difficulty to adapt to new conditions**.

GRAPH 28

PER GENDER POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF NOT TAKING A PARENTAL LEAVE

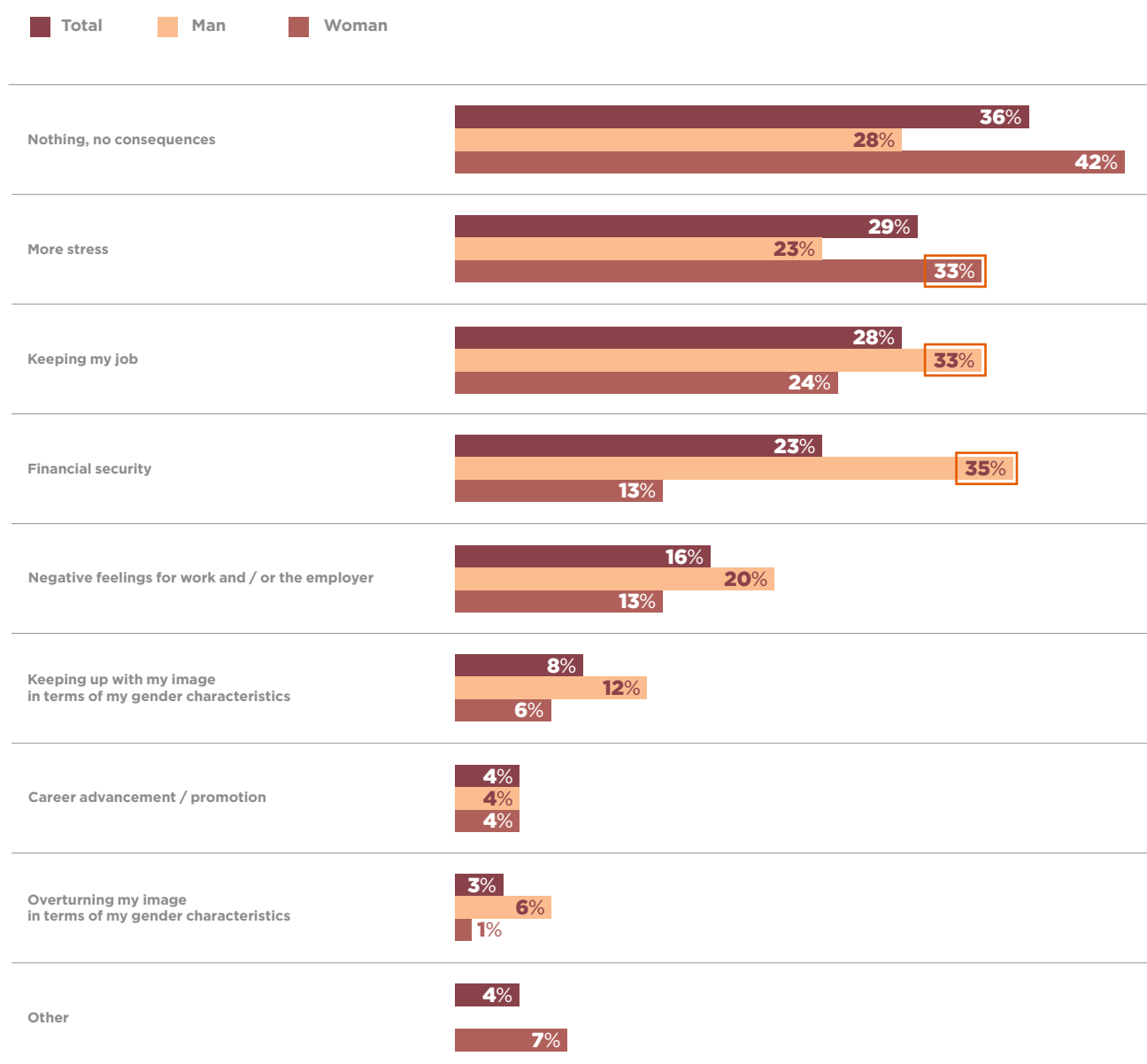


In contrast, the consequences of not taking a parental leave for the respondents' professional lives appear to be more positive (Graph 29). With the exception of **increased stress levels**, which is the most frequent response among all participants and especially so among

women, **maintaining their job and their financial security** are more commonly listed as the consequences of not using a leave. These positive consequences are more common among the men who answered this question.

GRAPH 29

PER GENDER POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES ON THE PROFESSIONAL LIFE FROM NOT TAKING PARENTAL LEAVES



5.6 | INTENTION OF USING LEAVES AND MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

Given the changes recently introduced to the institutional framework for work/life reconciliation, it is worth presenting the findings related to people's intention of using parental leaves **in the future**. The persons who participated in the qualitative survey emphasised their intention to make use of parental leaves in the future, acknowledging, however, that there are factors which can inhibit this decision:

“If I am entitled to something - yes, I will be affected if I feel judged - but I will do it. However, to many people, many many people, this can be very stressful.”
 - Woman, 31 years

In fact, they claimed that it is very likely **they would seek other work** in case their employer refuses their request for a parental leave or is not willing, in general, to support efforts for work/life reconciliation.

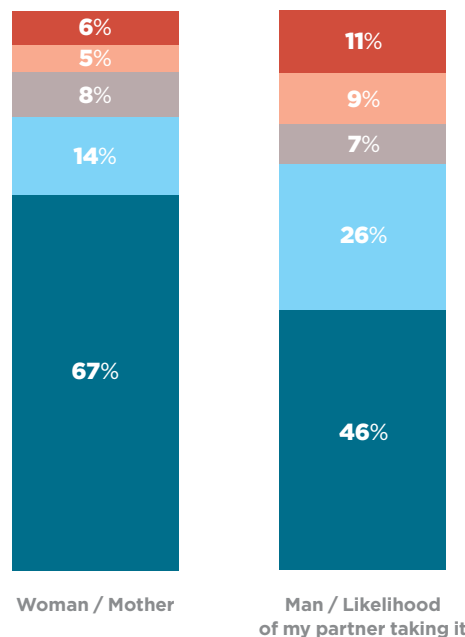
Similarly, in the quantitative survey 81% of mothers state they intend (rather or very likely) to make use of a maternity protection leave if they have a child in the future. Men, correspondingly, report a 72% chance that their partners will take this leave (Graph 30).

For men, the corresponding percentage for the intention of using a paternity leave in the future is 76%, while women report a 63% chance that their partners will take a paternity leave (Graph 31).

GRAPH 30

INTENTION OF USING THE SPECIAL MATERNITY PROTECTION LEAVE IN THE FUTURE

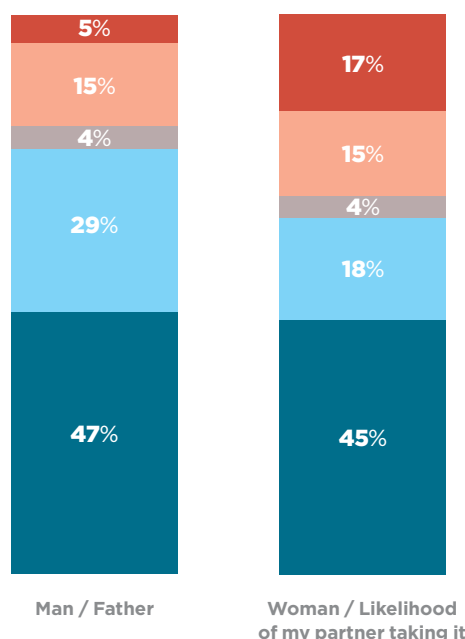
Very likely Somewhat unlikely I don't know
 Somewhat likely Definitely unlikely



GRAPH 31

INTENTION OF USING A PATERNITY LEAVE IN THE FUTURE

Very likely Somewhat unlikely I don't know
 Somewhat likely Definitely unlikely



One of the interviewees, who planned on having a child in the immediate future, had the following comments with regard to the reasons for which he intends on using the paternity leave:

“Because you have to be there. For practical reasons, to help my wife, and because, especially in the first period and generally the first years, you have to give your time exclusively to this part as much as possible, to help things and to also spend time with the newborn.”

- Man, 34 years

The difference in the intention to use the two leaves under review, addressed exclusively to mothers and fathers respectively, highlights the belief that the mothers’ role in childcare is more important and, at the same time, the need to raise awareness among fathers and mothers alike, in order for the former to make use of paternity leaves, recognising the multiple benefits arising from it. Nonetheless, among the persons who are not parents yet but plan on having children in the near future, **the percentage of men willing to take a paternity leave is increased, standing at 80%.**

In the case of the childcare leave, the disparity between women’s and men’s answers is more significant (76% compared to 64%) (Graph 32). The same is approximately true for the case of parental leaves (77% compared to 68%) (Graph 33). With these two leaves, it is telling that women claim that the probability of their partners using them stands at 57% and 55%, respectively. These findings underline the fact that **the stereotype concerning the mother’s need and obligation to handle childcare is very much socially normalised.** In fact, it applies even when children are older, as in the case of the parental leave, which can be taken until the child becomes 8 years old.

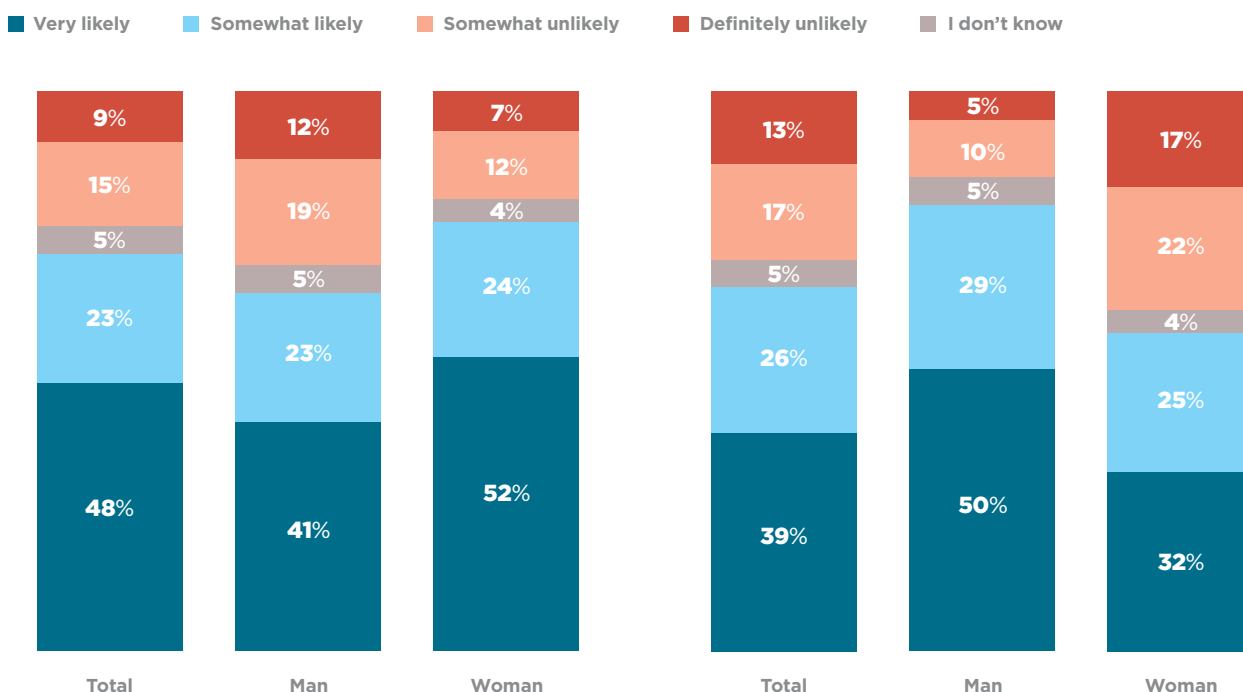
Along the same lines, it is telling that the interviews revealed that men, when finding themselves in a pressing or non-accepting work environment, have a very different outlook on the possibility of using the leaves they are entitled to, considering them to be **optional**. In contrast, when women find themselves in similar situations, they might change their outlook on having children, since they consider that taking one or more leaves is a given in such a case:

GRAPH 32

PER GENDER INTENTION OF USING A CHILDCARE LEAVE IN THE FUTURE...

...of you taking the childcare leave?

...of your partner taking the childcare leave?



he were to take it, the reduction of our family income would be greater.”

- Woman, 31 years

Nevertheless, as seen in the following Graph, for most men, the two most important factors that would promote the use of parental leaves is making their **use by fathers mandatory** and smoothing out the process of getting the leave from the employer.⁷⁵

It appears, in other words, that more men would use parental leaves if this was not their personal choice or was not presented as their personal choice but as a compulsory condition, and if taking this leave did not

put them in a conflict or a negotiation with the employer; if, therefore, **the overarching company culture was more open to these choices.** (Graph 34). Through his comments, one of the participants in the qualitative survey working in the technology sector, underlines the role of the company culture also in shaping the employees’ stance towards them making use of their entitlements:

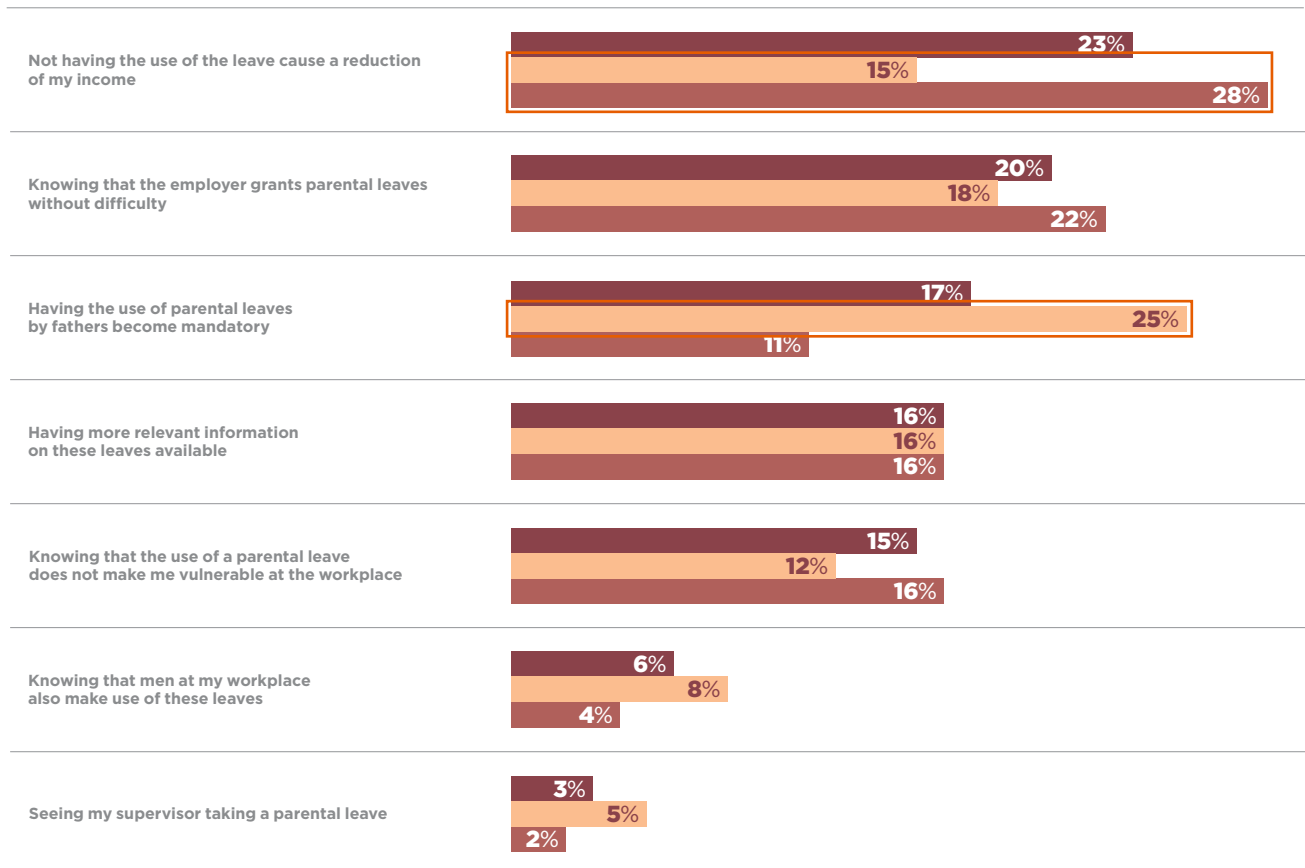
“In our sector there is no prejudice against taking them, especially when it comes to family leaves. I have not experienced this anywhere and to me it seems only normal to take this leave.”

- Man, 34 years

GRAPH 34

MEASURES TO PROMOTE THE USE OF PARENTAL LEAVES BY GENDER

■ Total ■ Man ■ Woman



⁷⁵ The interviews that were carried out revealed that this smoother process is more commonly provided in large companies, mainly multinationals, where the relevant policies are incorporated in the company culture and where even information surrounding the leaves that parents, men or women, are entitled to is given in a systematic manner. However, this condition seems to apply only to short-term leaves and not to the more extended ones.

SECTION 6

Conclusions and proposals

The reconciliation of work and family life as a topic lies at the centre of institutional and research interest in recent years. Policies to promote women's employability and participation in the labour market change the status, leading more and more families to adopt the **“double career” model** and mandating a **re-negotiation of traditional gender roles** within and outside the family. In this sense, gendered sharing of care responsibilities in the family context is being re-evaluated, in order to identify the factors that affect it and to promote a more gender-equal sharing of the family obligations and, consequently, women's and men's participation in the labour market on more equal terms.

Parental leaves are included in the policy measures to support working parents, to help them meet their multiple obligations in terms of work and care for their children. Therefore, they are **an important tool to promote the more equal sharing of care responsibilities** between women and men, mothers and fathers. To this end, the recent European Directive 1158/2019, transposed into the Greek legislation in 2021, enhances those leaves and significantly extends the duration of paternity leaves, thus laying the foundations for facilitating work and family life balance, and the fathers' more active engagement in parental care.

Nonetheless, leave systems may be one (basic but not unique) parameter contributing towards improving work/life balance, but they do not necessarily lead to a bridging of the gender gap recorded in the field of unpaid childcare. Even though research, including this study, has captured the multiple benefits from increasing men's involvement in raising and caring for their children, this continues to be a largely **“female affair”**, even when it comes to caring for children who are older and not only babies, when the role of the mother is accompanied by other functions.

The Women On Top survey investigates and captures this gap, showing the **different concerns men and wom-**

en have in relation to work/life balance, which correspondingly reflect the different gender undertaking of their parental role, in line with dominant gender stereotypes. Women experience care provision as a more “personal” matter, since, for the most part, they are the ones occupied with it, in comparison to men. On the other hand, men are more concerned with meeting the needs of their children, looking more for support solutions “outside the home”. This dimension is confirmed by the analysis of men's and women's attitudes towards perceptions associated with gender stereotypes. While it is a promising sign that the majority of respondents state they do not stand behind opinions which perpetuate gender expectations, it is still troubling that a significant percentage continues to embrace them, with men and, what is more, younger people, irrespective of their gender, playing a part in their persistence.

The terms and conditions associated with parental leaves are not always known to the persons who are entitled to them. Nevertheless, even though the degree of familiarity with leaves that are technically addressed to either parent does not vary significantly in relation to gender, such leaves are usually used by women.

In the case of men making use of them, the choice may be influenced by their partner's employment status (whether she works in the public or private sector).

The gender gap recorded in the use of parental leaves can be interpreted **in many ways**. It is worth noting that about half the men have not made any use of the discussed parental leaves, making it clear that the gender perceptions which “absolve” men from caring for their children, even when being theoretically challenged, are still well entrenched in our daily lives. At the same time, the fathers' “choice” to not use their leaves may be tied to either an **internalisation of gender stereotypes** or a fear of being judged by their social circle, which could also take the **form of stigmatisation in a work culture that does not promote the message of gender equal-**

ity. However, even those making use of the paternity leave, which is an exclusive entitlement of the father, see it as a means to support mothers, a view perhaps stemming from the fact that the parental leave system itself promotes the perception that care is an exclusively “female affair”, maintaining the paternity leave’s short duration.

In any event, the fact that the family decisions about taking a leave also depends on the **economic effect this will have on the family income**, makes it clear that the issue of work/life balance is intertwined with a series of gender inequalities (e.g. gender pay gap) which is often not included in the discussion on the gendered sharing of care responsibilities.

Mothers, because they take more time off work, suffer on a financial level (loss of income) and on a professional level, as they face more difficulties in adjusting to their work reality when they return to work. They also note that another consequence they have to face is unfavourable treatment at work. This **double pressure** from attempting to fulfil multiple roles ends up causing feelings of guilt and emotional stress to mothers: they feel they are letting down their children and they cannot keep up with the workflow.

Based on the above, it is not surprising that most men feel that **making the uptake of parental leaves mandatory for men**, and therefore taking the burden of choice off them, will be the most helpful measure in order for them to use the leaves. At the same time, most women report that **maintaining their income**, i.e., having full income coverage while using family protection leaves would encourage them to use those leaves. The fathers’ use of leaves that either parent is alternatively entitled to could, however, **be promoted through additional incentives**, such as, for example, by **increasing parental allowances or extending the leaves if they are used by both partners or reducing the work hours of both parents**, as discussed in Section 3 for the case of Germany.

In addition to these proposals, which refer to changes in the existing legal frame on parental leaves, in order to encourage their more equal uptake, **it is critical to promote institutional interventions to eliminate the inequalities that continue to be present in it.** These interventions refer to: a) **increasing the duration of**

paternity leaves, which despite their recent extension continue to communicate the secondary role that fathers play in caring for the new family member, and are found slightly above the European average before Directive 1158/2019, and b) **equating the duration of parental leaves (upward adjustment) for employees in the private and public sector**, as the need for child-care does not vary depending on the parent’s sector of employment.

Given that the main cause of gender inequality are the dominant gender stereotypes, which dictate men’s and women’s roles, any action to raise awareness towards gender equality will favour the more equal sharing of care responsibilities. In this sense, **the adoption of leaves that target a more active involvement in family care on men’s part must necessarily be accompanied by awareness-raising actions**, which, on the one hand, provide information on leave terms and conditions, so people become familiar with the option of using them, and, on the other hand, **communicate messages to challenge the stereotypical views concerning the role of the father**, which, as clearly captured, are a significant obstacle for change.

These actions that are meant **to inform and raise awareness among the people entitled to parental leaves** must be taken by the State, **but it is necessary for employers and companies to also play their part.** More specifically, companies must **systematically and individually inform their employees** about their entitlements as parents/carers of children, and also make sure that **this information is available at all times** to their staff, by creating special sections on their intranet or webpage.

However, in order for employers to take relevant initiatives, **the State, again, bears the burden of providing incentives, also showcasing the benefits that companies have from promoting gender equality and work/life balance.** Increasing productivity; enhancing the employees’ loyalty and commitment to the company; attracting and retaining talent, are just some of the benefits recorded by companies endorsing work and family life reconciliation actions.

The positive aspects and consequences of these actions must be highlighted through information cam-

paigns by government and non-government agencies, in order for companies to design policies that not only adhere to the legal provisions, which are already mandatory as it is, but specify **additional benefits for working parents, for which they will be rewarded by the State**. It should be noted that **company policies must be formulated based on the employees' needs** in each company and **be developed through a sharing of views and experiences**, ensuring, in this manner, their effectiveness and the simultaneous engagement of all stakeholders.

A good practice⁷⁶ recorded in this regard comes from Denmark, where the largest telecommunications company implemented a generous policy on parental leaves. When it determined, however, that only a few fathers were using it, it organised a **targeted campaign to inform the male employees and clarify that taking the leave would not harm their careers**. As a result of this campaign the company received an award by the State, became very well known, and the use of parental leaves by fathers has become an integral part of the company's culture.

In Greece, we have the institutional framework (Law 4606/2019) which specifies that the State may reward companies for implementing equal treatment and equal opportunities policies for the female and male employees. At the same time, we have the experience from carrying out the European Project “SHARE - Promoting work-life balance in companies and a better sharing of care between men and women»,⁷⁷ through which a pilot Equality Badge was awarded to companies that take action to promote work/life balance. Therefore, **the institutional capabilities and previous experience must be used to continuously mobilise companies towards them taking initiative to eliminate gender stereotypes, promoting work/life reconciliation for their employees and enhancing the fathers' participation in parental care**.

For employees with family obligations, time management is a major challenge. Therefore, **promoting and**

enacting measures to increase flexibility in the working hours or the way work is provided is expected to help significantly all those tasked with childcare responsibilities (or the care of other dependents). The extraordinary conditions of the pandemic forced many organisations to implement teleworking, which was not previously common in Greece, showing that for many employees, fulfilling their work duties and being productive does not necessarily mean they have to work at the employers' facilities. This option, along with a flexibility in selecting one's work hours, are measures that significantly help parents to manage their time and meet their professional and family obligations more successfully.

As an example, the relevant good company practices include the adoption of family-friendly working hours (remote work and/or reduced hours). Nonetheless, the adoption of relevant measures and/or policies to promote the use of parental leaves (e.g., paternity leaves) by companies, must also be accompanied by symbolic and, at the same time, meaningful practices, conveying the message that taking the leave does not affect one's career. To this end, **having senior executives, who serve as role models, make use of such possibilities helps effect change in the work culture, towards the direction of equality, and encourages employees to use these measures without the fear of being stigmatised or facing negative consequences on their employment status**.

Working parents, and mainly working mothers, who are absent from work for an extended period of time because of taking parental leaves, describe this period as “empty time” in their careers. Aside from the impact on their professional development, losing touch with work developments intensifies their feeling of anxiety about their ability to adjust to their work activities upon their return. Many of the people who take leaves to fulfil their family obligations feel excluded from a series of professional opportunities from which they could have benefited. In this context, to increase the use of family care leaves, it could be useful during the leave term, **provided that the employee is willing, for the em-**

⁷⁶ This good practice is presented in: EIGE, *Supporting reconciliation of work, family and private life Good Practices*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, as referenced in: Theofilopoulos, T. & Moschovakou, N., *Educational Handbook for Promoting Gender Equality Initiatives in Companies*, Athens: Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, 2021, p. 48.

⁷⁷ The Project titled: “SHARE – Promoting work-life balance in companies and a better sharing of care between men and women” was carried out between 2020 and 2022, between the General Secretariat for Gender Equality (coordinator), the Research Centre for Gender Equality KETHI, and the Organisation for the Professional Empowerment of Women, Women On Top.

ployer to remain in contact with them, informing them on the developments or course of work, as well as on the **available professional training and on-going education opportunities, to which they could participate.**

It is a given that the employee's absences give rise to significant problems, especially in the operation of small and medium-sized enterprises, where the employee number is small and each individual handles tasks that cannot be easily covered by others. To address these problems and facilitate the employees in these companies, so they can make use of the measures to fulfil the care needs in their families - without feeling any pressure or guilt - it could be useful to **establish a frame for meeting emergency personnel needs.** This frame could be designed at the initiative of employers' associations, possibly with State support, to ensure explicit and full labour rights both for the persons who have taken parental leaves and for those who are called to substitute them during their absence. To this end, employers' associations could take steps to ensure they attract and retain a number of individuals who can work as temps in different companies, following the submission of a relevant request by the company and

the evaluation of their needs by a coordination centre responsible for the entire initiative. When the measure is supported by the State, it can be based on the re-design of subsidised employment programmes for companies, with the aim of combating unemployment.

The effort towards a more equal distribution of family care responsibilities between men and women cannot and should not be limited to the adoption of measures which are detached from more general interventions and policies in the direction of gender equality. It is telling that different aspects of gender inequality, on multiple levels, are interconnected, ultimately playing a part in preserving the dominant order of gender, even if their correlation is rarely brought up in public discourse. A revealing example is the fact that the gender pay gap affects the family decision making process as regards the uptake of parental leaves and that, subsequently, this decision leads to professional losses for the persons who actually take the leaves, which are ultimately reflected on the gender pension gap. Therefore, **any effort to bridge the gender gap in parental care cannot be blind to the wider inequalities** and must be accompanied by corresponding measures to alleviate them.

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