



***The changing face of motherhood in Western Europe:  
Switzerland***

***The Social Issues Research Centre 2012  
Commissioned by***



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## 1.1 Switzerland

### 1.1.1 Introduction

According to a Save the Children study, Switzerland is the 14<sup>th</sup> best place in the world to be a mother.<sup>1</sup> Swiss motherhood is characterized by the ongoing presence of traditional family values, although there are groups and individuals who do not conform to such principles. Swiss women were late, by western European standards, to enter the world of politics and to gain equal legal rights with men. The traditional idea of women as homemakers still exists, especially amongst older generations. Switzerland's federal political structure means that state interference in issues concerning mothers and the family is limited and a laissez-faire attitude towards the family prevails.

### 1.1.2 Historical perspectives

Swiss society has been characterised for centuries by a distinct division between the male public sphere and the female domestic sphere. It is only in the past few decades that legislative changes have challenged this divide. These changes have seen rising levels of women, including mothers, entering the workforce and men taking a more active role in home and family life. Longstanding ideas about men and women's specific roles and duties, however, can still be found in contemporary Switzerland.

Swiss democracy was not the product of the French revolutionary idea of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' in 1789, which informs the democratic cultures of many western European states today. Instead, Swiss democracy can be traced to pre-1789 communal traditions, when being a citizen was inextricably linked to also being a soldier.<sup>2</sup> This definition inevitably excluded women from being conceived of as citizens. A popular analogy right into the twentieth century saw the functions of the state reflected in those of the home. The institution of marriage, and the roles of husband, wife and children within the domestic sphere could be taken as a microcosm of the Swiss state; the men were involved in the decision making and leadership processes, while the women cared for and nurtured others. This binary distinction of gender roles can be seen reflected in the way in which Swiss women framed their arguments for increased political representation. In 1945, the Swiss Federation for Women's Suffrage campaigned for the introduction of political equality between Swiss men and women. The

central tenet of their argument was that it should not just be men who decided political issues that affect family welfare – women should be able to contribute to this area of politics in their capacities, first and foremost, as women and mothers. The issue of women's suffrage continued throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. In 1957, the Swiss Government argued in favour of women's suffrage, saying:

*"It is true that our democracy makes larger demands on the competence of citizens. But even Swiss women will meet these demands without having to neglect their duties as housewives and mothers."<sup>3</sup>*

Again, a woman's primary role was identified as a domestic one and her right to participate in the public sphere was on the condition that it would not be to the detriment of her housewifely and motherly responsibilities. It was not until 1971 that the weight of public opinion fully changed and women were allowed to vote in Federal elections, the last out of all countries in Western Europe.

It was not until the 1980s that women received the same recognition as men in terms of welfare provision. Switzerland is divided into political regions, cantons, which throughout the country's history has made it difficult to coordinate large scale centralized government initiatives. This is evidenced by the limited state welfare provision in Switzerland. Unemployment benefits were only introduced in 1977 and mandatory health insurance in 1996. World War II prompted the introduction of the first state welfare initiatives to secure the incomes of men who had gone to war. Wage and earnings protection was introduced in December 1939 for all men, but not for women. In 1945 a state old age pension scheme and a social insurance scheme were also introduced. Both of these were based on the assumption that the default lifestyle for adult Swiss women was one where they were married and their husband was the head of the household. It was the husband who had ultimate entitlement to both public funds. Indeed, if a woman became divorced she lost her right to claim any of the social insurance to which she had been entitled while with her husband as well as her ability to claim the pension entitlements they had built up while married. It was not until 1986, in response to the pressure of feminist groups, that a new marriage law was introduced and that marriage-dependent state social security ended.

The sharp distinction between the public and private in Swiss culture means that it is the mother who is ultimately responsible for the wellbeing of her children. The definition of the term, 'motherhood', *mutterschaft* in the Swiss German language, is limited to the biological process of pregnancy and childbirth. The connotations of

<sup>1</sup> Save the Children (2011) State of the World's Mothers.

<sup>2</sup> Staempfli, Eigenverlag Regula, (2005) Democracy without motherhood? Public space and gendered discourses in Swiss postwar politics. [http://www.regulastaempfli.ch/pages\\_deutsch/pdf\\_html/english/motherhood\\_schluss.pdf](http://www.regulastaempfli.ch/pages_deutsch/pdf_html/english/motherhood_schluss.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Staempfli, Eigenverlag Regula, (2005) Op Cit.

motherhood in Switzerland mean it can be identified as an exclusively female task. This definition is also seen in the legal context of motherhood which deems it as inseparable from the female body. The condition of motherhood is, therefore, seen as a private matter borne by women and outside the jurisdiction of the state. This *laissez-faire* approach is reflected in the fact that the term 'welfare state' did not appear in the Swiss constitution until its revision in 1999. The state's obligation to provide maternity protection (*mutterschaftsschutz*) is an ongoing debate. A 'motherhood insurance bill' was rejected by the Swiss people in June 1999. It was not until 2005 that all pregnant women were given the right to take maternity leave on full pay for up to 14 weeks. Despite these signs of progress, Switzerland remains culturally limited in its provision for modern-day mothers. The phrase 'parental leave' does not exist in the Swiss German dialect. The term that is used is taken from high German and does not have a spoken form. There are sections of Swiss society who do not accept this traditionalist outlook, but it appears that mainstream Swiss political culture has yet to accept state intervention in the responsibilities of mothers.

### 1.1.3 Demographics of motherhood

In 2009 the fertility rate in Switzerland stood at 1.5 births per woman of childbearing age<sup>4</sup> National fertility had increased from the mid-1990s, but Switzerland was still lower than the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) average and most member countries had seen an increase in fertility over the previous decade. Swiss mothers are also some of the oldest in Europe – 29.6 years old is the average age of first time mothers.

Other statistics reveal the force of traditionalism in contemporary Swiss culture. In 2008, 17% of the children born in Switzerland were born out of wedlock. This marked an increase from 5% in 1980, but is extremely low when compared to other countries such as Sweden, Norway and France where over 50% of children are born to unmarried parents. In 2007, 84.7% of children lived with their two parents who were married or, more rarely, cohabiting. Single parent families are not common and most Swiss children grow up in a household with their biological mother and father. Teenage pregnancy rates are also the lowest out of all of the OECD countries, with 4 children being born per 1,000 women aged 15-19.

Female employment for women aged 15-64 is 73.8%, which is the third highest amongst the OECD 34. High levels of employment extend to mothers as well, and in 2007, 70% of women with at least one child between the age of 0-16 was in paid work.<sup>5</sup> There are some signs that striking a balance between having a successful

professional and private life is not easy for Swiss women. In 2004 40% of women with a tertiary level of education did not have children.<sup>6</sup> This, along with the low fertility rate, suggests that some women are making a choice between child rearing (or at least are choosing to have smaller, more manageable families) and work, rather than attempting to strike a balance between both.

### 1.1.4 Defining 'motherhood' in the Swiss context

Mothers are deemed to be the best person to provide care for their child, with other child care options being seen as second rate alternatives. The *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (Swiss People's Party) is the largest political party in Switzerland.<sup>7</sup> In 2011 the party explained its position on parental responsibility, saying that:

*"Small children should at least have one person of reference to ensure their psychological stability. Public institutions such as Kindergarten, places for midday meals etc. could and should not replace the parental care and love. The parents are responsible for their children's upbringing and development."*<sup>8</sup>

This dominant political opinion is reflected in the fact that there is limited childcare available and schools often do not serve midday meals – instead they provide a long lunch break that gives children the opportunity to go home to eat. This does not, however, reflect a consensus of opinion regarding the role of mothers. The article which featured the quote from the Swiss People's Party above, goes on to argue that the opinions of mainstream Swiss political parties are representative of an older generation's attitude towards the family and that the younger generation is in favour of a reformulation of the public/private and male/female divisions that have been traditionally present in Swiss society. Increasing pressure is coming from parents for the state to assist them with the demands of raising a family. At the centre of this debate is the demand for an increase in the availability of flexible working time, without endangering one's career prospects, so that parents can balance child care with their work life. It is the case, however, that Swiss parents are less interested in the introduction of more extensive child care facilities or financial assistance to pay for formal care.<sup>9</sup> Rather, they are asking for changes in routine so that they can personally look after their children, confirming the view that other forms of childcare are a poor substitute for the care a parent can provide for their own child. Mothers may not want their maternal responsibilities to bar them from continuing with other

<sup>6</sup> Adema, W. & Thévenon, O. (2004) *Bébés et employeurs: la Suisse face aux autres pays de l'OCDE*

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/28/33878252.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> The party's website can be found at <http://www.svp.ch/>

<sup>8</sup> 'Expat mami', The Gender Role

<http://www.expatsmami.com/2011/04/673/>

<sup>9</sup> Adema, W. & Thévenon, O. (2004) Op Cit.

<sup>4</sup> OECD Family Database [www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database)

<sup>5</sup> OECD (2011) *Families are changing*  
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/61/34/47701118.pdf>

aspects of their lives, but it seems that a fundamental maternal responsibility that they are not willing to sacrifice is to be able to look after their children themselves.

The meagre amount of state assistance for the family, when compared with other European countries, can in part be explained by the federal structure of Switzerland and the level of involvement women have in politics. Olivia Thoenen argues in an article for the *German Policy Studies* journal that a decentralised state has two major implications for policies that assist families.<sup>10</sup> First, a federated society means there are more opportunities for veto, making it difficult to bring about change at state level. The provision of maternity leave for example, was vetoed several times before it became law in 2005. Second, a federated state makes for a fragmented fiscal system. This means that the highest federal level does not have a huge income, and so it becomes difficult to finance centralised public policies. Thoenen also points out that countries with more women in political bodies have a higher public expenditure on female-friendly policies. In 2005, 25% of seats in the Swiss parliament were held by women.<sup>11</sup> This is slightly above the OECD average of 24%, but Sweden fares best with 45% of seats in parliament being held by women. Despite Switzerland's average number of female politicians it is, perhaps, the case that this, combined with the fact that women have only been very relatively recently allowed to participate in politics, means that there is not a tradition of motherhood and the family being included in the political agenda.

Despite limited state assistance, mothers now spend less time doing household and family work and more time in paid employment.<sup>12</sup> To support the decrease in work done in the home by women, fathers are spending significantly more time on domestic chores than they were a decade ago while still spending about the same amount of time working in paid employment.<sup>13</sup> Mothers still work slightly longer hours than fathers if non-remunerated work is counted. For a Swiss couple whose youngest child is under the age of 7, the mother works an average of 73 hours per week, while the father works 71 hours.

Returning to the implications of a decentralised Swiss state it can be seen that lack of state assistance for the family is not universal. The level of autonomy exercised by

the cantons has allowed the Canton of Fribourg to take the lead in assisting mothers by increasing maternity allowance and introducing heavily subsidised childcare facilities for very young children.<sup>14</sup> It may be difficult to decide upon family policies at a national level, but the cantons have sufficient power to respond to the demands of their electorate. The federal structure is key to understanding the nature of motherhood in Switzerland today.

### 1.1.5 Motherhood and Employment

Traditional gender roles still play an important part in Swiss society, especially amongst older generations.<sup>15</sup> Switzerland, however, has seen changes in female workforce participation over the last couple of decades. In 1992, 40% of mothers were economically inactive, whereas by 2010 this figure had fallen to 22%.<sup>16</sup> A smaller proportion of fathers now work full time compared to in 1992, suggesting that they are increasingly taking on domestic responsibilities. It remains the case, however, that far more women work part time than men, and the overall share of mothers working part time has risen over the last two decades. Despite more mothers entering formal employment, the patterns of their working lives tend to be very different from those of their spouses.<sup>17</sup>

The Swiss Federal Statistics Office found that in 2010 89% of fathers and 17% of mothers with children under the age of 25 worked full time, while 61% of mothers and 7.3% of fathers with children in the same age group worked part time. A period of part-time employment allows parents of young children to balance a demanding home life while continuing work. In Switzerland, however, it appears that the rigidity of the different forms of employment available mean it is difficult for women to make the transition back from part time to full time work and it is also uncommon for mothers to have flexible working hours in order to fit their work in around childcare.<sup>18</sup> Most mothers, therefore, end up remaining in part time work, which then has a negative impact on their career progression.

As discussed earlier, most of Swiss society still sees it as important that a mother is the one who is the primary care giver for her child. Without the option of flexible working hours, most mothers remain in part time work so that they can fulfill this maternal duty. The tendency for women to take on part time work when they become mothers means that the male-breadwinner, female-care giver model is still dominant in Switzerland. When

<sup>10</sup> Thoenen, O. (2010) Reconciliation of Work and Family Life in Switzerland, *German Policy Studies*, 6(3).

<sup>11</sup> OECD, *Women and Men in OECD countries*, Political and Economic Power: Women in Parliament.

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/45/63/37964630.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Gender Equality*, Data indicators: economic activity of mothers and fathers, <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/Vereinbarkeit/01.html>

<sup>13</sup> Change measured between 1997 and 2007. Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, *Gender Equality*, Data indicators: economic activity of mothers and fathers,

<http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/Vereinbarkeit/01.html>

<sup>14</sup> Reported in Swiss newspaper *24 Heures* in June 2010.

<http://www.24heures.ch/soutenant-parents-fribourg-active-politique-familiale-2010-06-11>

<sup>15</sup> Widmer, I. & Kellerhals, J. (2002) *Modern family or modernized family traditionalism?: Master status and the gender order in Switzerland*, *Electronic Journal of Sociology*,

<http://sociology.org/content/vol006.004/lwk.html~>

<sup>16</sup> Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, Op Cit.

<sup>17</sup> Widmer, I. & Kellerhals, J. (2002) Op Cit.

<sup>18</sup> Adema and Thévenon (2004), Op Cit.

compared with other Western democracies, Switzerland lags behind in terms of the level of success in integrating women into the labour market.<sup>19</sup> In her study of family and work life balance in Switzerland, Olivia Thoenen constructed an 'index of public support to reconcile family life and employment'. She calculated that 83% of Swedish people supported the reconciliation of family life and employment, as did 40% of British people, compared with just 13% of the Swiss population. While the decentralised nature of the Swiss cantons explains the difficulties in orchestrating large, state-wide initiatives, it seems that there simply is not the public support to bring about policies that offer mothers better ways of balancing their work and family lives.

Maternity leave was only introduced very recently in Switzerland. Before this legislation, many employers allowed pregnant women to take leave while still being paid anyway, but it was not until June 2005 that women obtained the statutory right to demand a maternity benefit from their employer. Swiss mothers are now entitled to 14 weeks maternity leave, receiving 80% of their normal pay (in the Canton of Bern women receive up to 16 weeks at 100% pay), although there is still no right to paternity leave.<sup>20</sup> By European standards, 14 weeks is not very generous – the UK offers 52 weeks, and Norway 56 weeks.

While there are low levels of support for state initiatives to help working mothers, the issue still remains in the media spotlight and there are high profile groups working for change. In November 2011, for example, the *Commission fédérale de coordination pour les questions familiales* (Federal Commission for the coordination of family issues) argued that paid parental leave of a minimum of 24 weeks should be introduced to help the reconciliation of family and work life and especially to encourage fathers to take a more active role in child rearing.<sup>21</sup> It may not have reached a majority of consensus amongst the Swiss people that there should be such, but the issue of how mothers should conceive of and cope with the demands of home and work are a part of ongoing public debate.

It should be noted again that there are marked differences between cantons with regards to the employment of mothers, again highlighting the diversity that this political structure creates. In Vaud and Zürich, for example, 70% of parents are in employment, whereas in Tessin the percentage stands at 62%.<sup>22</sup> The political agenda with regard to the family is for the most part determined by the individual cantons and the federal level, apart from the

introduction of maternity leave in 2005, does not become overly involved.

### 1.1.6 Childcare

Despite traditional gender roles being evident in the Swiss world of work, the amount of time men and women spend caring for their children is relatively well shared when compared with some other European countries. According to one study, women spend around 16 hours per week caring for their children in one way or another, a figure that is amongst the highest in Europe, while men spend around 7 hours a week.<sup>23</sup> Women still spend significantly more time providing child care, but this sort of distribution between the sexes is only matched by the Netherlands and the Nordic countries – Southern European countries have much greater inequalities.

Availability of formal childcare in Switzerland is limited, and the options that do exist, such as the private *Kinderkrippe*, are very expensive and places in municipal crèches are in short supply.<sup>24</sup> This shortage of child care facilities has been linked to the low levels of fertility Switzerland is experiencing<sup>25</sup> compared to the relatively high fertility levels in a country such as France that has extensive formal child care provision. Again, the federal structure of Switzerland poses specific challenges, and benefits and childcare policies differ from canton to canton. In the canton of Ticino, for example, infant schools are widely available for three to four year-olds while Lausanne and Zürich have a system of income-tested childcare fee support for working parents to assist in the purchase of private facilities.<sup>26</sup> These measures, however, are too limited to provide sufficient childcare and public investment in childcare is low at about 0.2% of GDP, compared with Denmark or Sweden where over 1% of GDP is allocated for these purposes. Numbers of very young children in formal childcare are especially low, with only 12% of 0 to 3 year-olds enrolled in formal care in 2010.<sup>27</sup>

The only federal level public support for extra-familial childcare was introduced in 2002 with the aim of boosting childcare provision in Switzerland and encouraging women to remain in work once they became mothers. The *Anstoßfinanzierung* is a form of financial aid for which day care centres, full-time schools and child minder organisations can apply. To be eligible, the applicant institution should not be profit-oriented, their funding should be assured for at least the next six years and they

<sup>19</sup> Thoenen, O. (2010) Op Cit.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.emplaw.co.uk/lawguide?startpage=data/20033221.htm>

<sup>21</sup> Reported in Swiss newspaper '24 Heures' on 10.11.2011.

<http://www.24heures.ch/depeches/suisse/conge-parental-partage-egalite-24-semaines>

<sup>22</sup> Adema and Thévenon (2004), Op Cit.

<sup>23</sup> Eurostat (2009), *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*.

<sup>24</sup> Expat mami', The Gender Role.

<sup>25</sup> Bonoli, G. (2008) The impact of social policy on fertility: evidence from Switzerland, *Journal of European Social Policy*, 18(1).

<sup>26</sup> OECD, Newsroom, *Give Swiss working mothers more support to avoid labour shortage and foster economic growth*, 25.10.2004.

[http://www.oecd.org/document/57/0,3746,en\\_21571361\\_44315115\\_33\\_844665\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/57/0,3746,en_21571361_44315115_33_844665_1_1_1_1,00.html)

<sup>27</sup> Thoenen, O. (2010) Op Cit.

should meet the quality requirements of their own canton. A successful organisation then receives a maximum of 3,676 Euros, per place per year for two years. Between 2002 and 2008, 24,000 new places were created in childcare services across the country, which marked a 50% increase in provision of childcare.<sup>28</sup> This increase is not, however, purely a mark of the initiative's success, as evaluations of the program have suggested that most of these places would have been created anyway. Levels of provision also vary according to canton, with the most extensive provision being found in Basel-Stadt and Vaud, where the constitutions guarantee that children will receive a place in a day care centre at an affordable price.

### 1.1.7 Values and popular representations

The year 2011 marked 40 years since women were given the vote in Switzerland. Media coverage of the anniversary suggests that upon being given a voice in politics, women have often been more conservative than their male counterparts and have been the ones to block reforms.<sup>29</sup> In the referendum on paid maternity leave in 2004, for example, women voted more conservatively than men. In 2011 family policy of any kind seemed to be dropping off the political radar. The Swiss website Family Leben, 'Family Life', ran a story on the 2011 federal elections, noting that, compared with the 2007 election campaigns, family was hardly mentioned, and the strength of the Swiss franc, migration policy and nuclear energy dominated the political discussion.<sup>30</sup>

This lack of public concern for the challenges faced by Swiss families is also evident in Family Leben's recent 'family barometer' study. The magazine interviewed 1,000 parents in German speaking Switzerland who lived in households with children. Around half of those questioned believed that Switzerland was 'not a family-friendly country'. It was also reported that an attitude existed whereby men who worked less than 80% of full time were not 'taken seriously' by society. The major problems facing families were identified as being a lack of childcare and the physical distance that often existed between parents and their extended family. Indeed this isolation experienced by parents has meant that advice and support is coming from new sources for many Swiss mothers. In May 2011 a Swiss blog reported that when women become mothers their internet and radio use increases, while their use of magazines and newspapers, deemed to be too 'time intensive', dropped.<sup>31</sup> Mothers are using the internet to gather quickly information and advice on

mothering while before they would have gone to their own mothers or other family members for such advice.

The Swiss media are also concerned with the trend of first time mothers becoming progressively older in Switzerland. In 2007, Switzerland was the first country to record two women giving birth in the same year who were over the age of 60.<sup>32</sup> Mothers of such an advanced age are not the norm though, and only 5 women over 50 became mothers in 2007. It is, however, normal to see women over the age of 30, including those who have reached the age of 35 (35 being that age that one is classified an 'older mother' who is prone to health risks and birth complications) becoming pregnant. The pregnancy of the French president's forty-something year-old wife Carla Bruni has reignited the debate on older mothers in 2011. The French-language Swiss newspaper *24 Heures* suggests that heightened career aspirations, improved contraception and an increase in divorce and second marriages means that women are more likely to put off childbirth until later in life.<sup>33</sup>

A lack of centralised government directives on motherhood has heightened the damage done by the economic crisis of the late 2000s on mothers' career prospects. It is the responsibility of employers to introduce practices and policies that are family-friendly and, therefore, it is then also within their power to cease the implementation of such initiatives. Public debate has centred around the fact that because there exists no statutory obligation for employers to provide part time work, women are now losing their jobs when they ask for a reduction in working hours upon becoming mothers.<sup>34</sup> There is evidence of organisations launching new initiatives to try to assist working mothers with these newfound difficulties. *Travail Suisse*, a Swiss trade union, launched a website called *mamagenda* in June 2011, which provided advice and guidance on how to balance one's work and home life during and after pregnancy.<sup>35</sup> Most working Swiss mothers, however, are far from reaching a work-life balance with which they are satisfied. In November 2011, 'mama blog' highlighted the fact that 'work-life balance' remains an ever popular phrase at the centre of discussions on motherhood that works to hide

<sup>28</sup> Thoenen, O. (2010) Op Cit.

<sup>29</sup> Article for NZZ published on 11.01.2011, *Vier Jahrzehnte Frauenstimmrecht*. [http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/politik/schweiz/vier\\_jahrzehnte\\_frauens\\_timmrecht\\_1.9056150.html](http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/politik/schweiz/vier_jahrzehnte_frauens_timmrecht_1.9056150.html)

<sup>30</sup> Article can be found on <http://www.familienleben.ch/11-politik/1972-wahlen-2011-schweiz-thema-familie>

<sup>31</sup> Blog article can be found at <http://blog.zeit.ch/2011/05/studie-93-prozent-der-schweizer-mutter-nutzen-das-internet-taglich/>

<sup>32</sup> SwissInfo article covers the story on 11.05.2008.

[http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Specials/Votes\\_for\\_women/Women\\_and\\_family/Switzerland\\_records\\_first\\_over-60\\_mothers.html?cid=657272](http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Specials/Votes_for_women/Women_and_family/Switzerland_records_first_over-60_mothers.html?cid=657272)

<sup>33</sup> Article published on 17.05.2011.

<http://www.24heures.ch/depeches/people/enceinte-40-ans-courant-risque>

<sup>34</sup> Reported in NZZ on 22.03.2011.

[http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/wirtschaft/aktuell/kind\\_da\\_job\\_weg\\_1.2237762.html](http://www.nzz.ch/nachrichten/wirtschaft/aktuell/kind_da_job_weg_1.2237762.html)

<sup>35</sup> Mamagenda: [www.mamagenda.ch](http://www.mamagenda.ch)

the huge amount of stress and conflicting demands involved in being a working mother.<sup>36</sup>

75.5% of children with parents who have completed higher education also take part in sports.

### **1.1.8 Single motherhood**

In 2007, 84.7% of Swiss children aged between 0-14 lived in a household with both their parents.<sup>37</sup> 12.9% of children in the same age bracket lived in a household with just their mother, while 2.3% lived with just their father. Lone mothers are more likely to be employed than mothers with a partner and also on average work longer hours when formal and informal (for example childcare, domestic chores) work are combined.<sup>38</sup> It has been suggested that the limited state wide family policies have a considerable effect on Switzerland's single mothers, who often have to balance work and childcare with little external support.<sup>39</sup>

### **1.1.9 Motherhood and sports**

According to reports from parents in the Swiss Household Survey conducted in 2007, almost three quarters of Swiss boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 13 are members of sports clubs or a similar sort of organisation.<sup>40</sup> The most popular sport for boys was football, and for girls dance and gymnastics. It is difficult to measure participation in sport for very young children as they are more likely to take part in unstructured physical activities.<sup>41</sup>

Relationships can be established between the behaviours of parents and their child's level of participation in sport. Setting an example appears to be important – 74.6% of children whose parents were active in a sports club participated in sports themselves, while 65.2% of children whose parents were not active sports club members participated in sports.<sup>42</sup> A link also exists between the parent's educational level and their children's participation in sport. Nearly two thirds (63.9%) of children whose parents left education at the end of compulsory schooling participate in sport, while 71.4% of children with parents who finished upper secondary education do, and

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<sup>36</sup> Blog article can be found at

<http://blog.tagesanzeiger.ch/mamablog/index.php/19935/die-work-life-balance-luge/>

<sup>37</sup> OECD Family Database [www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database](http://www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database)

<sup>38</sup> Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft, Gender Equality, Data indicators: economic activity of mothers and fathers, last updated 04.03.2010. <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/en/index/themen/20/05/blank/key/Vereinbarkeit/01.html>

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, an article in *Swissinfo* published on 15.05.2009. [http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Home/Archive/Single\\_parents\\_unite\\_in\\_pl\\_ea\\_for\\_backup.html?cid=983940](http://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/Home/Archive/Single_parents_unite_in_pl_ea_for_backup.html?cid=983940)

<sup>40</sup> Zimmermann-Sloutskis, D., Zimmermann, E., Wanner, M., Mäder, U. & Martin, B. (2009) Sport activity in children aged 5 to 13 years in the Swiss Household Panel 2007 levels and relationship with parents' behaviour. *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Sportmedizin und Sporttraumatologie*, 57(2):69-71.

<sup>41</sup> Martin, B.W., Mäder, U., Stamm, H. & Braun-Fahrländer, C. (2009) Physical activity and health – what are the recommendations and where do we find the Swiss population?, *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Sportmedizin und Sporttraumatologie* 57 (2), 37–43.

<sup>42</sup> Zimmermann-Sloutskis et al (2009) Op Cit.

## 1.2 Swiss national survey

### 1.2.1 Introduction

SIRC conducted an online survey with 506 Swiss mothers to find out more about their experiences of motherhood. The respondents ranged in age from 16 to 55 years old, although 79% fell within the age bracket of 25 to 44. Most of the Swiss mothers had quite small families, with 47% having just one child, 40% having two children, 10% having three, and only 3% having a larger number.

At least one of the mother's children had to be between the age of 0 and 16 in order for her to be eligible for the survey. This ensured as certainly as possible that the mother had at least one child that was still dependent on her, and therefore that she was active in her role as a mother. In fact most respondents (63%) had at least one child that was below the age of 7.

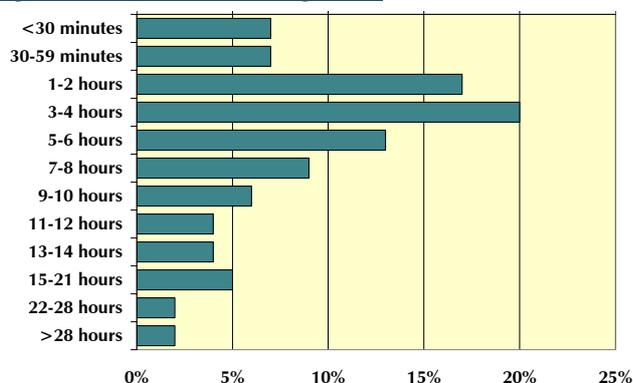
In terms of working patterns out side of the home, the most common form of employment for those surveyed was in a part time capacity (46%), that is, they worked for less than 30 hours a week. A further 21% were in full time jobs, and 33% were not in any kind of formal employment.

The cultural make up of Switzerland is complex. The country is not linguistically homogenous; with substantial portions of the population having either Swiss-German (64% of total population), Swiss-French (20%), or Swiss-Italian (7%) as their first language. The mothers involved in our study reflect this diversity well, with 69% of respondents being Swiss-German speakers, 25% French speakers and 6% Italian speakers.

### 1.2.2 Current free time and 'me time'

The mothers we surveyed were asked how much 'me time' they have in an average week. 'Me time' is defined as time that is available to devote purely to oneself, without any obligation to do something for other people. The results are presented in Figure 1.

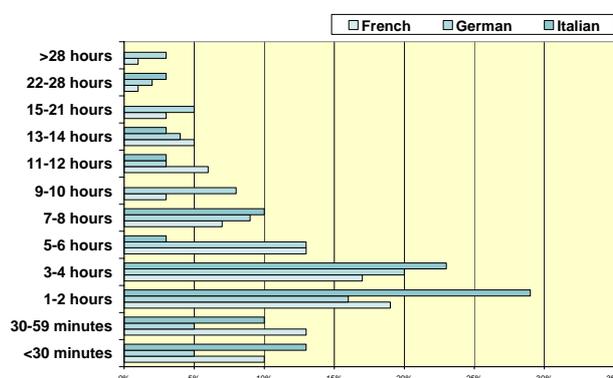
Figure 1. 'Me time' in an average week



The most frequent response given by our respondents was that they had between 3 and 4 hours of 'me time' in a week (20%). The average is 6.1 hours a week.

Further nuances are revealed when the responses are broken down according to linguistic groups, as is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. 'Me time' by linguistic groups



It appears that the amount of 'me time' that mothers report is primarily linked to the language they speak and not to the fact that they are Swiss nationals.

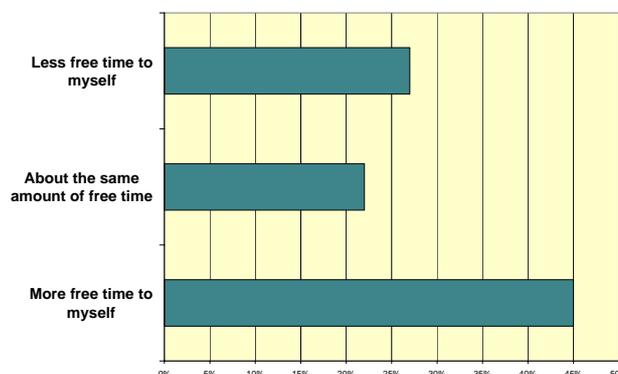
**The amount of 'me time' that Swiss mothers have varies according to their first language. Swiss-French mothers have more free time than their Swiss-German or Swiss-Italian counterparts.**

Almost a third (29%) of Swiss-Italian mothers report having between 1 and 2 hours of 'me time' a week, as do 19% of Swiss-French mothers and 16% of Swiss-German mothers. More Swiss-French mothers (39%) reported having 5 hours or more of 'me time', than Swiss German mothers (47%) or Swiss-Italian mothers (22%). It seems then, that lifestyles vary according to the linguistic group the mothers belong to, which further complicates the question of what it means to be a modern day 'Swiss mother'.

### 1.2.3 Generational comparisons

Figure 3 shows how much free time our respondents think they have in comparison with their own mothers when they were at the same stage in their lives.

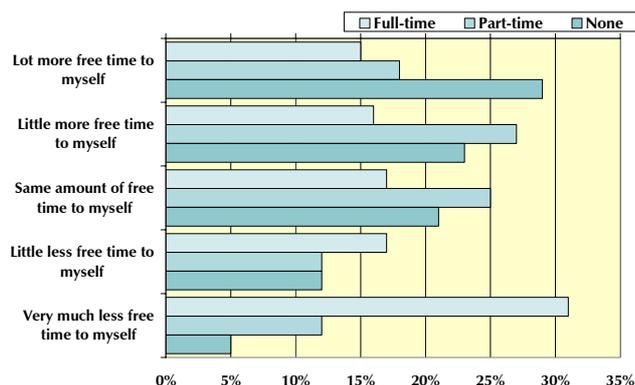
Figure 3. Free time compared to your own mother at the same life stage



Nearly half (45%) of the mothers we surveyed said they have more free time to themselves compared to their mothers. Fewer (22%) said they have about the same amount of free time, while 27% reported having less free time available.

A mother’s employment status is an important variable in determining how she perceives the amount of free time she has compared to her own mother, as is shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Free time compared to your own mother at the same age by employment status**



Of those who say they ‘have a lot more free time to [themselves]’, the majority are mothers who do not work (29% of all mothers not in employment). Looking to the other end of the scale, of all the mothers who say they ‘have very much less free time to [themselves]’, the vast majority are in full time employment (accounting for 31% of all full time working mothers).

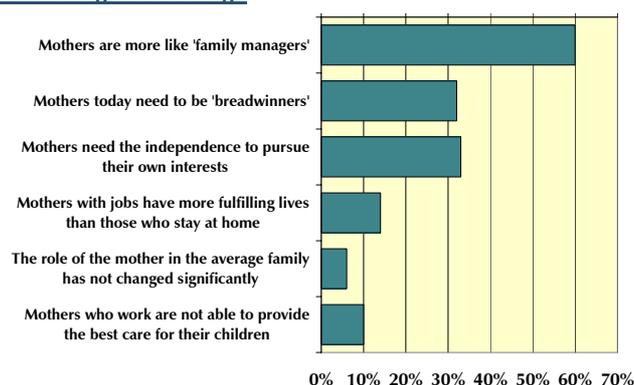
**31% of full time working mothers believe that they have a lot less free time compared to their own mother when she was at the same life-stage.**

The weight of opinion, as was seen in Figure 3, is that mothers today have more free time to themselves. It is important to note, however, that this is not the case for full time working mothers, who, when comparing themselves to their own mothers believe they have less ‘me time’.

### 1.2.4 Perceptions of change

The study also looked to establish a broader picture of the way in which the role of the mother today differed when compared to a generation ago. The mothers we surveyed were asked to choose the area, or areas, that had undergone change from the list of options given to them. The data can be seen in Figure 5.

**Figure 5. Differences between being a mother now and being a mother a generation ago**



The majority of those surveyed said that mothers today had to be more like ‘family managers’ than the mothers of a generation ago had had to be (60%).

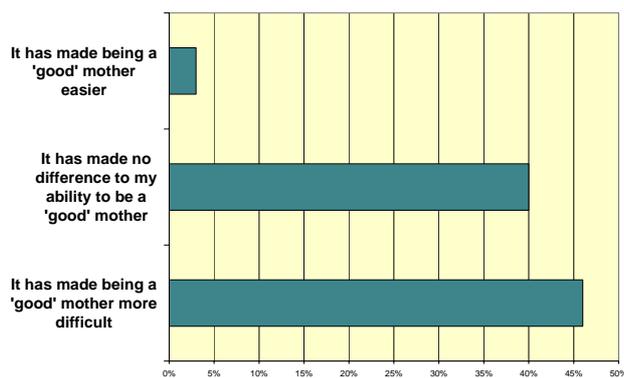
**The majority of Swiss mothers said that mothers today are more like ‘family managers’ than mothers a generation ago.**

The next most frequent answer saw 33% of respondents saying that mothers today needed ‘the independence to pursue their own interests more than my own mother did’. About a third (32%) of mothers focused on the expectations that now existed in connection with the world of work, agreeing that ‘mothers today need to be ‘breadwinners’ in the family much more than in [their] own mother’s day’. Only 6% thought that the role of the average mother had not changed significantly. Looking at the second and third most prevalent answers given, it is clear that mothers feel a greater need to pursue activities beyond the confines of the home. This appears to be motivated either out of a need to increase the family’s income or more personal desire to have greater independence. As a result of this, the way in which mothers operate within the home has changed, as they have to be more efficient in order to manage their busy schedules. This has resulted in their role within the home being moreover that of a ‘family manager’ than the ‘housewife’ that was common during their own mother’s generation.

### 1.2.5 Impact of economic downturn

Figure 6 shows the effect of the recent economic conditions on our respondents’ ability to be a ‘good’ mother. Almost half (46%) reported that they found it more difficult to be a ‘good’ mother, of which 21% believed it was now ‘very much more difficult’ and 25% said it was just ‘a little more difficult’. Following that, 40% thought that the recent economic conditions had made ‘no difference’ to one’s ability to be a ‘good’ mother, and 3% said that the economic climate had in fact made it easier.

Figure 6. Effect of recent economic conditions

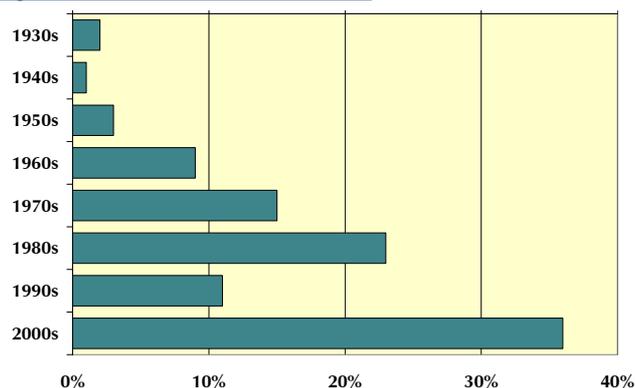


Despite the most prevalent answer being that the economic downturn has made being a mother more difficult, it is important to note the large proportion of mothers who thought that the changes in the economy had made no real difference to their abilities as a mother. This probably reflects the fact that Switzerland has not been very seriously affected by the recent economic conditions when compared to many other European countries. This notion is bolstered when one looks to the Mediterranean countries in our study, who registered a much more resonant sentiment that the recent economic conditions had made being a 'good' mother more difficult.

### 1.2.6 Ideal decades

Despite almost half of all our respondents noting that the recent economic conditions had had a negative effect on them as mothers, 36% said that the 2000s was the best decade to be a mother. Our respondents were asked which decade in the last 80 years they would choose to go back to, as mothers, if they had a time machine. The results are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Ideal decade to be a mother



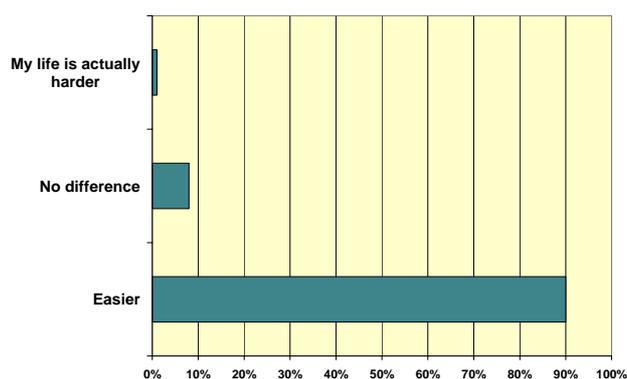
The next most popular decade after the 2000s was the 1980s, which 23% of mothers wanted to return to. Following that, 15% of mothers opted for the 1970s, and 11% for the 1990s.

### 1.2.7 Labour saving devices and impact on time-use

One reason that our mothers opted for the 2000s as their ideal decade may be to do with the ever increasing availability of labour saving devices which make one's life as a mother easier.

Figure 8 shows that 90% of the mothers we surveyed thought life had been made easier by 'labour saving devices and products that were not available to [their] own mother or grandmother'.

Figure 8. Extent to which labour saving devices have made life easier

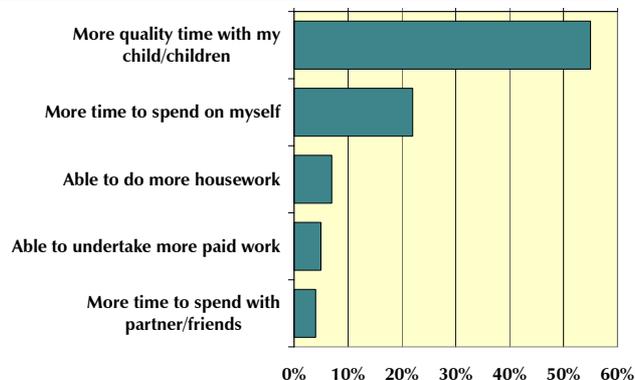


Of the 90% who said their lives were easier, 51% believed their lives were 'much easier' compared to previous generations and 31% thought they found life 'a little easier'. Only 8% thought that labour saving devices had made no difference to how easy they found day to day life, while 1% reported that life was in fact harder.

**The large majority of Swiss mothers say that their lives have been made easier and richer by labour saving devices.**

The ways in which our respondents opt to use the time they save by using modern labour saving devices and products is illustrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9. How time freed up by labour saving devices is spent

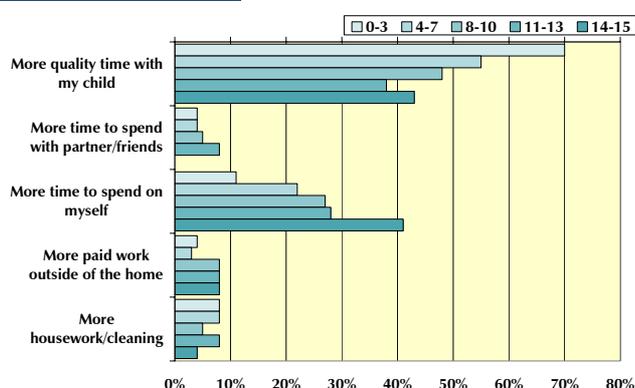


The majority of respondents (55%) would choose to spend more quality time with their children. After that, 22% of mothers would choose to spend more time on themselves.

These were by far the most prevalent answers, with only 7% saying they would do more housework, 5% that they would undertake more paid work, and 4% that they would spend more time with their partner or friends. It is interesting to note that ‘spending more time with your partner or friends’ was one of the least popular responses as it can be seen to be concerned with pursuing more ‘quality time’, which was also the topic of the most popular answers. It can be suggested then, that the ‘quality time’ and relationships that mothers feel they need to give precedence to, are primarily those with their children and with themselves.

Figure 10 shows how the same data looks when they are broken down by the age of the mother’s youngest child.

**Figure 10. How time freed up by labour saving devices is spent by age of youngest child**



Of mothers whose youngest child is under the age of 3 years, only 11% of them would opt for more time to spend on themselves, while 70% would choose more quality time with their child. Looking to mothers whose youngest child is between the age of 14 and 15, 41% would choose more time for themselves and 43% would choose more quality time with their child.

**Over half (55%) of mothers choose to use their extra free time to spend quality time with their children. Mothers of older children, however, are also likely (41%) to spend time on themselves while mothers of younger children are less likely to do so.**

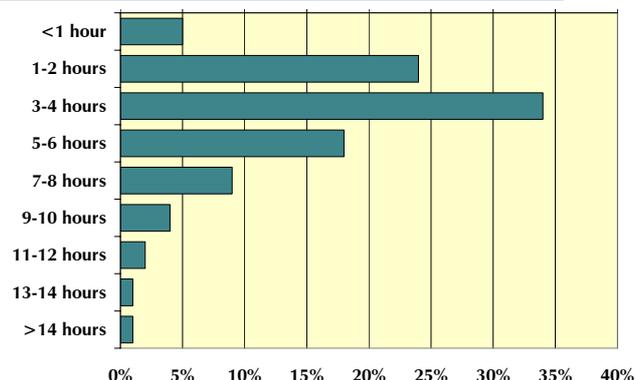
Spending more quality time with one’s children remains the most popular choice for all age groups, but the significant proportion of mothers with older children who would choose more time for themselves highlights the fact that it is when one’s children are very young that most emphasis is placed on the importance of spending time with them.

### 1.2.8 Time with children

Figure 11 shows how much ‘active time’ our respondents thought they spent with their children in an average day. ‘Active time’ comprises of activities such as reading,

writing or playing with one’s child, or washing, dressing or feeding them.

**Figure 11. Active time spent with child/ children in a day**



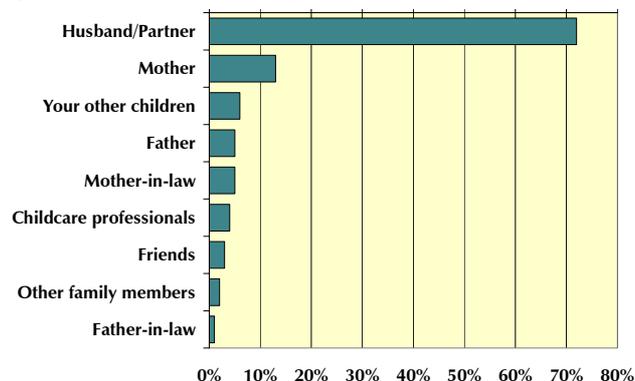
Around one third (34%) of the mothers we surveyed said they spent between 3 and 4 hours. Looking at all of the responses, Swiss mothers spend an average of 4.2 hours of ‘active time’ with their child in a day.

### 1.2.9 Help in the home

#### 1.2.9.1 Childcare

Figure 12 shows the main sources from which our mothers receive help with childcare.

**Figure 12. Main source of help with childcare in the home**



A clear majority rely primarily on their husband or partner to help with childcare (72%). The next most frequent answer saw 13% of respondents reporting that their mother is their main source of help. When compared to mothers in countries which place a stronger emphasis on the role of the extended family, such as Greece or Italy, Swiss mothers appear to rely little on their extended family and for the most part are self-sufficient as a nuclear family unit.

**Most Swiss mothers rely on their husband or partner, rather than their extended family, for help with childcare in the home.**

The large proportion of mothers saying that their husband or partner is the one who helps them most with childcare is also testament to the ongoing importance that is placed on marriage and the low numbers of single parent families

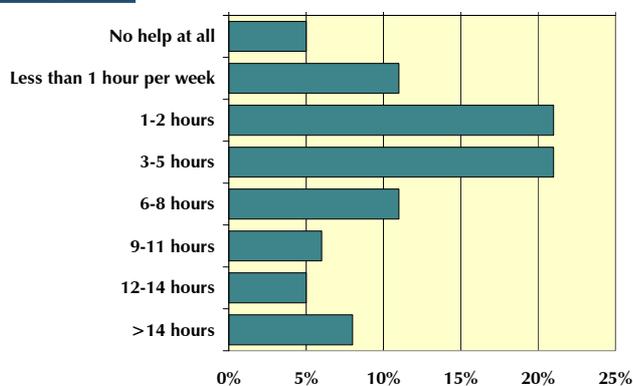
(as is discussed in section 3.3 of the background report). The vast majority of children grow up with two parents in the household, and for the most part these are also their biological parents.

Section 3.6 and 3.7 of the background report explore the limited nature of formal childcare provision in Switzerland. Indeed, only 4% of respondents said that their main source of help with childcare comes from childcare professionals. When one looks at this type of provision in terms of the type of employment the respondent is in, it is the case that 2% of non-working mothers rely on childcare professionals, as do 2% of part-time working mothers, compared to 12% of full-time working mothers. Although it is still a small proportion over all, it does seem to be the case that the use of childcare professionals is relatively popular among working mothers, making it possible for them to balance the demands of going to work and raising a family in a society where the active role of the extended family is diminished.

### 1.2.9.2 Domestic work

Having established that most of our respondents' husbands or partners represented the primary source of help when it came to childcare, Figure 13 shows how much help our mothers said their partners gave them with domestic chores such as childminding and housework in an average week.

**Figure 13. Help from your partner in the home during an average week**



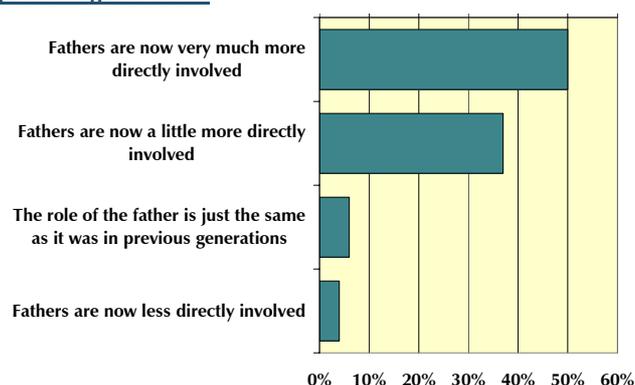
On average the mothers we surveyed received 5.1 hours of help per week. Among the countries included in the study, this meant that Swiss mothers came fourth place in terms of receiving the least amount of help from their partners. This would seem to qualify the notion outlined in section 3.4 of the background report, that traditional gender roles are still dominant in Switzerland, including the idea that within a family domestic responsibilities fall primarily on the wife and mother of the household.

**Swiss mothers receive just over 5 hours per week of help from their husbands/partners with domestic duties.**

### 1.2.10 Role of the father

The traditional nuclear family structure remains the most prevalent way of raising children in Switzerland, and 90% of our respondents do have a partner or husband. Figure 14 shows our mothers responses to the question, 'Do you think that fathers are now more or less directly involved in the day-to-day care of children than they were in your own parent's or grandparent's day?'

**Figure 14. Involvement of father in childcare compared with previous generations**

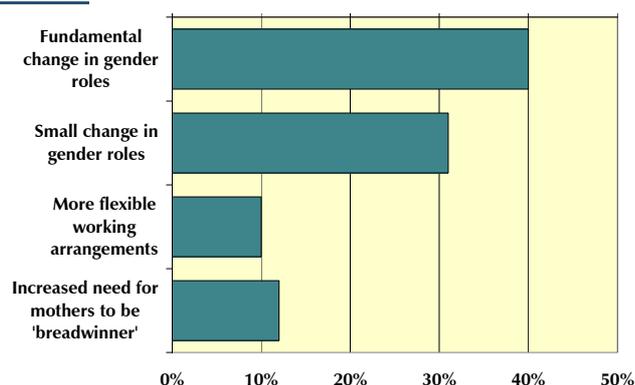


The substantial majority of our respondents answered that fathers were more directly involved in childcare than their own fathers or grandfathers had been (87%). This breaks down to 37% thinking fathers are 'a little more directly involved' and 50% saying that fathers are 'now very much more directly involved'. Only 4% thought that fathers are now less directly involved in the care of their children. As is stated in section 3.6 of the background report, Swiss fathers play a more active role in looking after their children than many of their European counterparts, despite the ongoing importance that is placed on traditional gender roles in Switzerland. Figure 14 reveals that our mothers think that the levels of paternal involvement seen today are due to changes and developments that have happened over the last one or two generations and so are a reasonably new development.

**Swiss fathers are now more directly involved in child care than in previous generations.**

Figure 15 shows what our respondents thought had been the most important factor in bringing about an increase in fathers' involvement in caring for their children.

**Figure 15. Reason for increase in father's involvement in childcare**



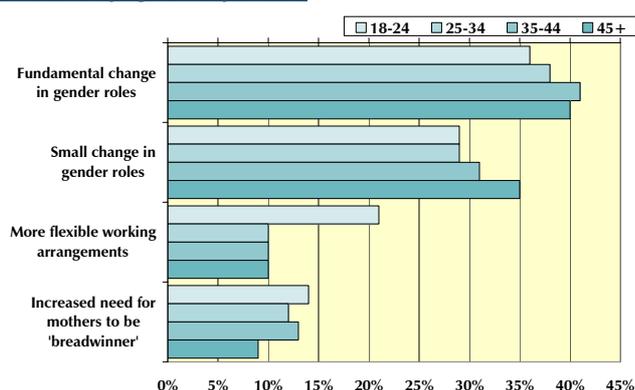
Most cited a change in gender roles in society as being the primary reason for change. Slightly less than half (40%) thought there had been a 'fundamental change', while 31% thought there had been a 'small change'.

**Nearly three quarters (71%) of Swiss mothers think that there has been a change in gender roles in society that has resulted in fathers being more involved in caring for their children.**

Just 12% cited an increasing need for mothers to be 'breadwinners' or simply to earn money as the most important contributing factor, and 10% said that more flexible working arrangements for men has meant they are now more involved in the lives of their children.

If one looks at the responses of the different age cohorts, a more nuanced picture appears, as can be seen in Figure 16.

**Figure 16. Reason for increase in father's involvement in childcare by age of respondent**



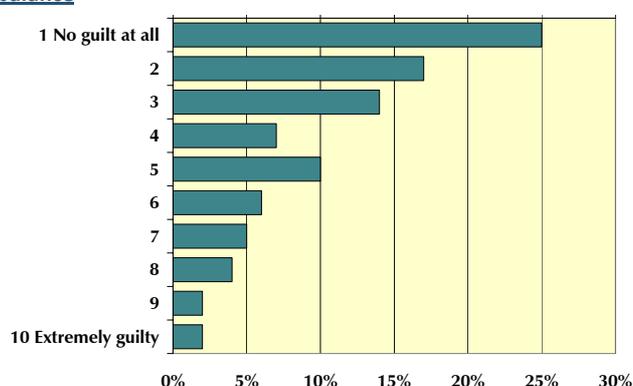
It remains the case that, regardless of age, the most frequent response was that a change in gender roles in Swiss society is the main factor resulting in men being more actively involved in caring for their children. Three quarters (75%) of 45 to 54 year-olds thought that a change in gender roles was the most important factor, as did 72% of 35-44 year-olds and 65% of 18 to 24 year-olds. It can be seen that mothers who are older are more likely to cite a change in gender roles as the primary factor. This may in

part be because they are more likely to have personally witnessed or experienced these changes taking place. It also interesting to note that 21% of mothers aged between 18 and 24, thought that 'more flexible working arrangements for men' were the most important area of change, whereas only 10% of each of the other age cohorts thought the same. It seems that the older mothers who took part in the survey perceive a change in terms of the expectations of both genders, but the younger mothers are also seeing this change translating into practical, tangible developments which alter the structure of a family's day-to-day life.

### 1.2.11 Maternal Guilt

Figure 17 shows the levels of guilt our Swiss mothers reported with regards to the balance they had between their paid work and their home life.

**Figure 17. Level of guilt about your paid work - home life balance**

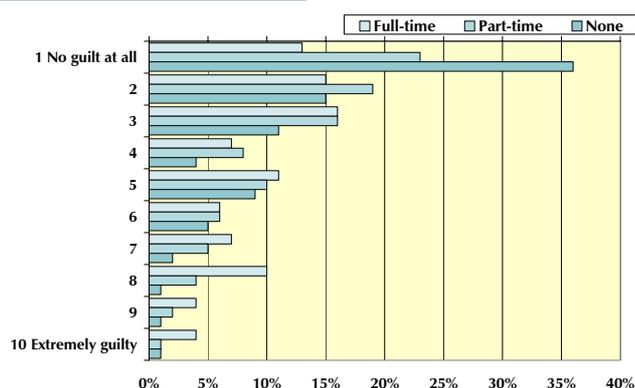


A quarter (25%) of all our respondents said that they felt 'no guilt at all'. On average our Swiss mothers registered their level of guilt at 3.5, the lowest out of all the countries included in this study.

**Swiss mothers feel the least guilty out of all the countries included in the survey about their paid work-home life balance.**

It can be seen that some types of mother feel guiltier than others. Figure 18 shows ratings of guilt according to the employment status of the respondent.

**Figure 18. Level of guilt about your paid work - home life balance by employment status**

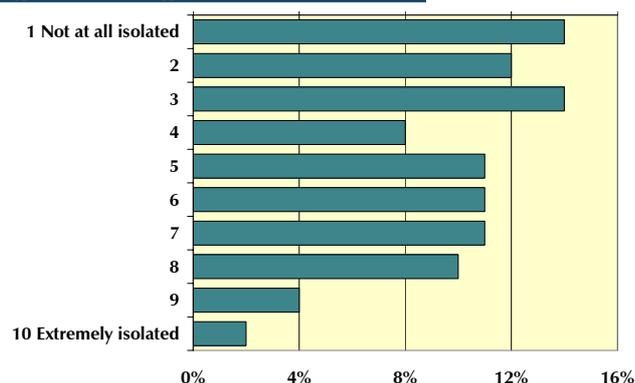


Nearly one third (31%) of full time working mothers had levels of guilt ranked at 6 or above. The same was true for 18% of mothers who worked part time. It is the case then, that mothers who work full time feel guiltier than their part time counterparts about their ability to balance their work and home lives. It is surprising to see that 10% of non-working mothers also registered levels of guilt ranked at 6 or above. These mothers are by definition not involved in paid work and so do not have a paid work-home life balance to strike. Perhaps the feelings of guilt they are expressing reveal feelings of culpability for the fact that they are not in employment and so do not have a work life-home life balance to maintain.

### 1.2.12 Maternal isolation

Figure 19 illustrates how our respondents, using a ranking system out of 10, answered the question, 'as a mother raising children do you ever feel isolated/unsupported and feel like you are having to deal with the challenges of raising children all on your own?'

**Figure 19. Feelings of isolation as a mother**

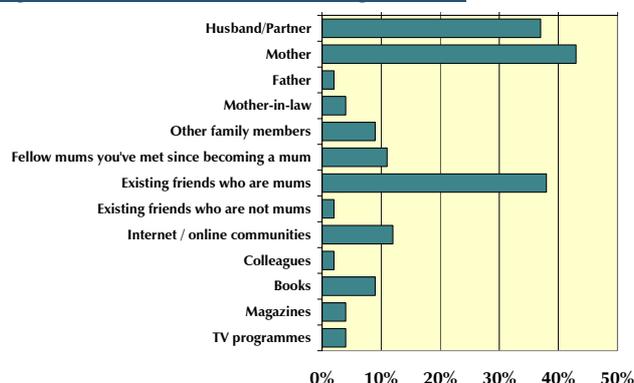


Swiss mothers were somewhat middling in terms of how isolated they feel when set alongside the responses from mothers in the other countries included in the study. The average score to represent how isolated they felt that was given by our Swiss mothers was 4.6 out of 10.

### 1.2.13 Support and advice

Figure 20 shows the sources of advice on being a mother that the mothers who took part in our survey said they most turned to.

**Figure 20. Sources of advice on being a mother**

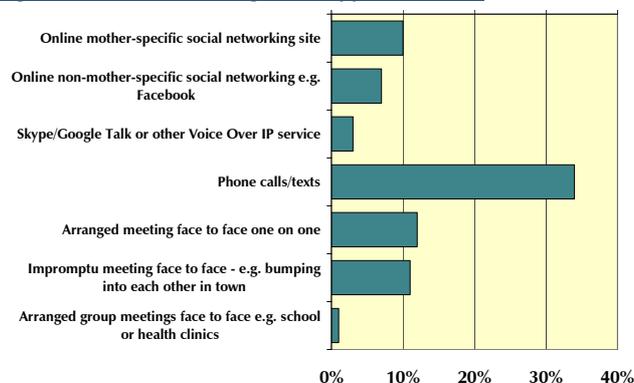


The most frequent response was that mothers turned to their own mothers for advice (43%). Following that, 38% turned to existing friends who were also mums, and 37% to their husband or partner. It seems then that the existence of, and access to good familial and friendship networks are important in providing Swiss mothers with security and support.

There was evidence of new means of seeking advice, with some respondents saying they most relied on the internet, and being part of online communities and forums (12%). A further 11% of Swiss mothers said their primary source of advice is fellow mothers who they have met since having children. This shows that some mothers expand their friendship network to include other mothers, who, probably because they have met in the context of being a mother have similar aged children, and so who are in a similar stage of their lives and are perhaps therefore best positioned to offer advice.

Figure 21 shows how our respondents are most likely to communicate with their support network.

**Figure 21. Communicating with support network**



Just over a third (34%) say that they rely on phone calls or texts. Markedly less actually meet with their support network as their main means of communication, with 12%

of respondents arranging to meet face to face, and 11% relying on impromptu meetings.

**About a third (34%) of Swiss mothers communicate with their support network via phone calls or texts. Fewer actually meet with their support network face to face, be it via arranged meetings (12%) or impromptu ones (11%).**

New technologies can be seen to be playing quite an important role in facilitating communication between mothers and their support network. Just 10% of the mothers in our study say that they rely primarily on online social networking sites that are specifically aimed at mothers. Looking closer at these statistics though, it is the case that 19% of the 18-24 year-old age group say that mother-specific social networking sites are their main method of communication.

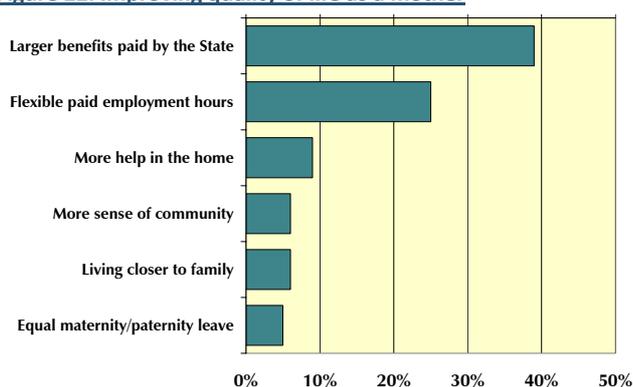
**The role that online resources play for mothers is growing in significance, with 19% of 18 to 24 year-old mothers using social networking sites as their primary means of communication with their support network.**

Younger mothers make more use of online communication tools than older mothers do, meaning that this is a way of making contact with one's support network which is likely to increase over time.

### 1.2.14 Improving the quality of life

The study then moved to look at what mothers would like to see change in Switzerland in order to improve their quality of life. The results are presented in Figure 22.

Figure 22. Improving quality of life as a mother



The most frequent response, given by 39% of the mothers surveyed, was that larger benefits from the state would most improve their quality of life. This is line with the situation described in section 3.4 of the background report. The ongoing importance of traditional values combined with the canton based administrative and political structure of the country, has meant that large state welfare initiatives are often politically unpopular and

practically difficult to implement, leading to the state playing a small role in supporting families.

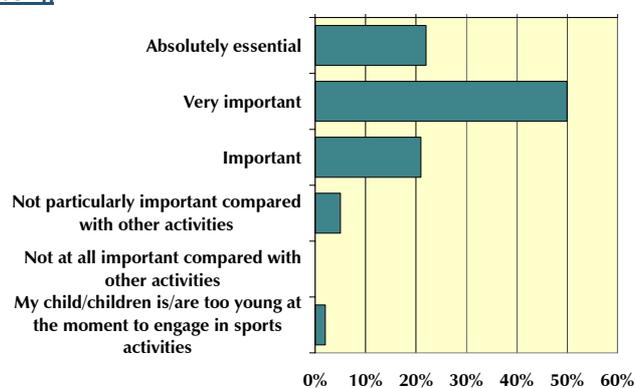
A quarter (25%) of respondents said that they want more flexibility to exist for paid employment hours. Far fewer mothers felt that they needed more help in the home (9%), a greater sense of community (6%), or to live closer to their extended family (6%). It seems that the areas our respondents most want to see change in show that they believe the Swiss government is failing to provide for mothers, and namely that the support it offers in terms of easing the stresses of employment and the extent of its welfare provision are lacking.

### 1.2.15 Sport

The study then looked to explore the role that sport played in the lives of children, and the impetus that mothers gave to their children's participation in sport.

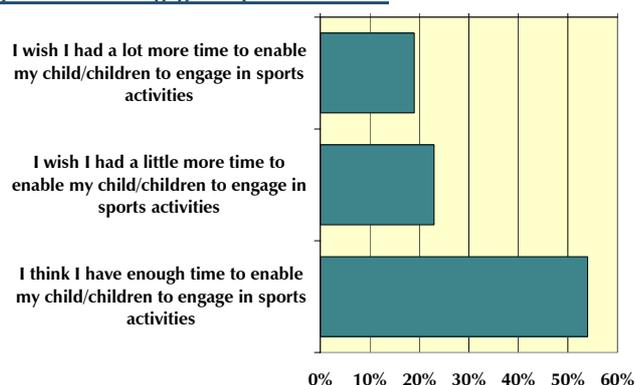
Figure 23 shows how important our respondents thought their child's participation in sport was for the sake of their development and well being. It can be seen that half of all the mothers surveyed thought that it was 'very important' that they child participated in sport. Indeed, 93% of mothers gave answers ranging from sport being 'important' to being 'absolutely essential' for their child. Only 5% said that it was 'not particularly important compared with other activities'.

Figure 23. Importance of sport for child's development and well being



Having established that the vast majority of Swiss mothers think it is important for their child to participate in sport; Figure 24 shows how satisfied mothers are with the extent to which they are able to help their child to engage in sports activities.

**Figure 24. Satisfaction with amount of time available to enable your child to engage in sports activities**



Over half (54%) of the mothers in our survey said they thought they had ‘enough time to enable my child/children to engage in sports activities’. A further 23% said they wished they had a little more time, while 19% wished they had a lot more time available.

**Figure 25. Satisfaction with amount of time available to enable child to engage in sports activities by employment status**

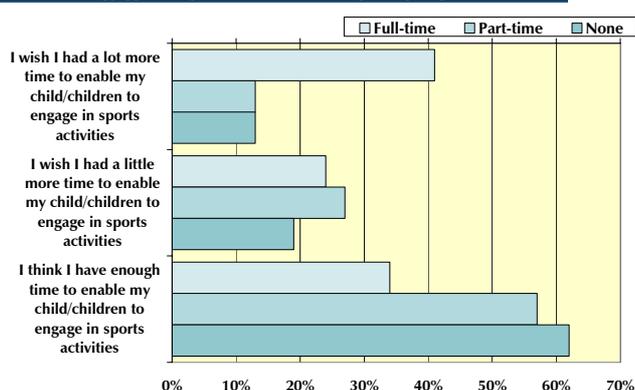
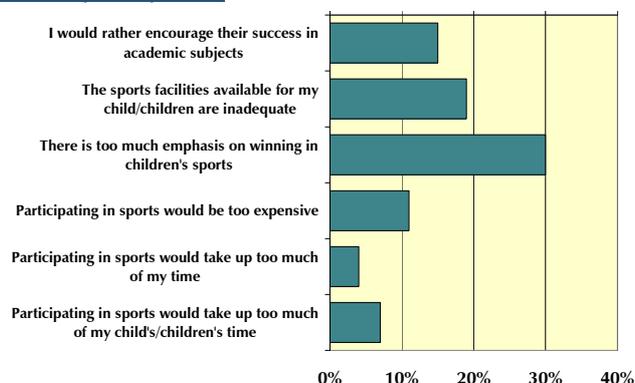


Figure 25 shows that employment status is important in determining how satisfied a mother feels about the amount of time she has to offer. A substantial proportion of mothers who are in full time employment wished they had a lot more time to contribute towards helping their children engage in sports activities (41%). The same was true for only 13% of part time working mothers and 13% of mothers not in employment. Looking to mothers who said they were happy with the amount of time they have to enable their child to partake in sports, a higher proportion of non-working mothers (62%) than part-time (57%) or full-time (34%) working mothers were to be found in this group.

Although only a very small proportion of Swiss mothers felt that participation in sport was relatively unimportant for their children, the reasons offered by this minority are shown in Figure 26.

**Figure 26. Factors that make children participating in sport relatively unimportant**



Around a third (30%) of the minority of respondents thought that there was ‘too much emphasis on winning in children’s sports’, while 19% said they would encourage their child’s sporting endeavours more if only there were better, or more, sports facilities available. There was also a slightly smaller proportion of mothers (15%) who did not find fault in sports provision per se, but thought that academic success was more important. A substantial proportion (22%), did say that ‘none of these’ factors made their child’s sports participation relatively unimportant. This suggests that, either their grievance with regards to children’s sports was not included in the study, or that there was nothing that makes sports participation unappealing or unimportant to them.