

**UNAF**  
**Report**



**Joint responsibility and  
work, personal and family  
life balance in Spain.  
Inequalities and  
transformations  
following COVID-19**

**Executive  
summary**



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# Joint responsibility and work, personal and family life balance in Spain. Inequalities and transformations following COVID-19

## Executive summary

UNAF has carried out a study in collaboration with the *Department of Sociology II at the UNED* based on a representative survey of people in the 25 to 65 age range, with a larger representation of those living with a minor of up to 5 years of age. The authors, Teresa Jurado Guerrero, Irina Fernández Lozano, Cristina Castellanos Serrano and Andrea Fernández Novo, looked at how the pandemic and the measures adopted to combat it have affected material well-being and the availability of time with which to balance work, personal and family life. The work and family conditions before the First State of Alarm (10/03/2020) and after the second (10/05/2021) are compared, taking into account the context of the policies at a European and Spanish level. An assessment of the effect of COVID-19 is given, with efforts made to avoid the middle class bias of other studies and provide a longitudinal perspective, in addition to information on the division of chores and joint responsibility.

## Setbacks in personal and family well-being

1. Migrants have accumulated the greatest disadvantages following the pandemic: lower work intensity, lower income and 34% of their households have difficulty getting to the end of the month. Some 27% of migrants would like to work more hours.
2. Those with lower levels of academic attainment are the group that remains at the top regarding disadvantages, with some 28% of households experiencing economic stress.
3. The pandemic has particularly hit migrant women and women with lower levels of academic attainment (some 39% and 34% respectively have suffered a loss of income).
4. Young women and men in the 25 to 34 age range have suffered more than those who are older with respect to unemployment and a reduction in hours worked. A significant percentage of young people would like to work more hours.

## How much are we spending on benefits for families and how much do we need to spend?

1. Spain has one of the lowest levels of spending on monetary benefits for families in the EU. Tax deductions for family reasons have a high weighting in family policy in Spain.
2. Some 60% of families with under-25s with incomes under €1000 do not get to the end of the month, because family benefits and tax relief do not manage to alleviate the lack of income from work.
3. Among those potential beneficiaries of the Minimum Living Wage some 58% do not get to the end of the month if they live with under-18s, despite its introduction during the period studied.

## Starting out in life: equality in leave for birth and care

1. Some 19% of those between 30 and 39 years of age have postponed plans to become mothers or fathers due to the pandemic.

2. The new individual, non-transferable leave for “birth and care” allowed, from 2021, the newborn to be looked after at home by either of their two progenitors for up to 26 weeks consecutively, if the leaves are used one after the other. However, more than 75% of fathers have used the leave for birth simultaneously with the mothers between April 2019 and December 2021.
3. Despite the progressive legal levelling up of the leave duration, its use by men is not as fully taken up as it is by women. The work of the man had more weight than that of the woman when deciding how to use the leave. Some 13% of the men who used the leave between 2016 and 2021 used at least a week part-time, against some 4% of women. Some 20% of mothers did not take any weeks’ leave or less than the legally established period, against some 40% of fathers.

## Up to 17 years of age: is joint responsibility for minors possible?

1. In some 42% of households with minors, those minors spent time in quarantine at home. Consistent with that, some 40% of those with dependent minors pointed out that the pandemic had meant an increase in the time dedicated to their care.
2. The majority of mothers did not feel that there had been joint responsibility with their partners regarding the assumption of domestic chores and care, even in those couples in which the two were working full time.
3. Some 17% of fathers and mothers living as a couple pointed out that arguments within the couple increased following the start of the pandemic. These arguments are due to the intensification of cohabitation (according to the men) and the division of domestic chores (according to the women).
4. Access to work-life balance measures have gender and social class bias: women use non-remunerated measures to a greater extent, and use fewer measures the lower the level of academic attainment or income of the occupied persons.

## Adult dependants: Does care still fall chiefly to women?

1. Public investment on benefits and services for long-term care is very scarce and among the lowest in the European Union. The employment conditions of formal and informal carers are highly precarious and they are paid little or nothing.
2. During the pandemic the proportion of men with care responsibilities for adult dependants has increased, but in 2021 a gender gap remains: some 27% of women (55-65 years of age) against 18% of their male peers.
3. Some 55% of those responsible for an adult person frequently feel burnt out, and 33% would like to have more leisure time.

## Summary of the impact of COVID-19 on joint responsibility balance

1. The pandemic has affected the economy and/or care time of 56% of people: foreigners, young people and those with just compulsory schooling due to a lack of economic resources, and university graduates and older people due to a lack of time. Some 15% of those with care responsibilities have been doubly affected. Social and age gaps have become more entrenched.

2. A lack of economic resources creates more discontent than a lack of time.
3. The distribution of employment within families with care responsibilities has created more social than gender inequalities.

## Policy recommendations

### Priority public policy reforms for joint responsibility balance

1. To reduce the ordinary working day to between 30 and 35 hours per week.
2. To adapt the *Minimum Inter-professional Salary* to the basic costs of family life.
3. To ratify in 2022 ILO Convention 189 on those employed in the home and their affiliation to the general Social Security regime.
4. To create a supplement per minor in the *Minimum Living Wage* in 2022.
5. To review the tax system as a whole in order to guarantee sufficient public revenue to allow the implementation of priority social policy.
6. To reform in 2022 the current leave for birth and care of a minor in order to guarantee that families can extend the care of babies in the home to 30 weeks (reform without additional cost for the social security system).
7. To guarantee the universal, free right to a place in first cycle infant education with adequate quality standards for a maximum period of 6 years.
8. To limit the new working hour reductions for care of a minor up to 12 years of age or dependent adult in such a way that not less than 75% of full hours are worked.
9. To guarantee universal, free right to a place in a quality dependant care service, whether a day centre, residential care or home help for dependent adults, establishing a maximum period of time for the services to be granted.

### Company policies to promote joint responsibility balance

