



FOCUS

Fostering Caring Masculinities

## Icelandic National Report

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Jafnréttisstofa



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# Contents

<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1. WORK LIFE BALANCE .....	5
1.2. NATIONAL REPORTS .....	6
<b>2. CONDITIONS OF THE LABOUR SPHERE.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 LEGISLATION ON WORK CONDITIONS .....	7
2.2 LEGISLATION ON PARENTAL LEAVE .....	8
2.3 STATISTICS ON EMPLOYMENT AND WORKING HOURS .....	8
2.4 STATISTICS ON WAGES FOR MEN AND WOMEN .....	12
2.5 STATISTICS ON LEADERSHIP AND BOARDS.....	13
2.6 STATISTICS ON GENDER-SPECIFIC TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT .....	13
2.7 STATISTICS ON PARENTAL LEAVE.....	14
<b>3. CONDITIONS OF THE NON-LABOUR SPHERE .....</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1. STATISTICS ON REPRODUCTIVE ARRANGEMENTS .....	16
3.2 STATISTICS ON EDUCATION AMONGST MEN AND WOMEN .....	20
3.3 STATISTICS OF CHILD CARE.....	21
3.4 STATISTICS ON MEN AND WOMEN IN POLITICAL POSITIONS.....	22
3.5 STATISTICS ON TIME USE .....	22
<b>4. SELECTED COMPANIES .....</b>	<b>25</b>
4.1 SHORT PRESENTATION OF THE COMPANIES .....	25
4.2 KEY INFORMANTS .....	25
<b>5. THE WORKPLACE STUDY .....</b>	<b>28</b>
5.1 FINDINGS FROM THE INTERVIEWS .....	28
5.2 STRATEGIC PLAN WITHIN THE COMPANIES ON GENDER ISSUES .....	37
<b>6. RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>7. CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>8. REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>43</b>



# 1. Introduction

The project Fostering Caring Masculinities (FOCUS) aims to examine and improve men's opportunities for balancing work and private/family life in order to encourage the preparedness of men to take over caring tasks. To reach this goal the project focuses on companies' framework conditions to perceive and include men as actors and target groups in equality policies.

FOCUS is a project involving five countries: Germany (Dissens e.V.), Iceland (Centre for Gender Equality), Norway (The Equality and Anti-discrimination Ombud), Slovenia (Peace Institute) and Spain (University of Girona).

The project is funded through EU's Community Action programme to promote Gender equality between men and women. FOCUS is connected to one of the prioritised themes of the program, "the role of men in the promotion of gender equality, in particular the role of men and fathers in the reconciliation of work and private life". The project was initiated by the Norwegian Ministry for Children and Family Affairs which also co-funds the project.

## 1.1. *Work life balance*

According to Fiona Williams (2003) we should not ask ourselves how care and the needs for care are implemented in the work, but how work can be involved and implemented into care. This line of thinking, acting and implementing the work/life balance aims at family friendly policies as well as at work policies enabling men and women to share responsibilities, caring and family life. In this regard traditional gender roles are challenged, which opens space for rethinking the concepts of men, women, femininity and masculinity. Moreover it changes the perception of caring as a gender-related burden and an undervalued activity in society. It enables us to think of it as beneficial for the public sphere.

Europe is currently characterised by a new type of work life where dual-career adaptations are more common along with increased requirements for flexibility. Responsibility for care is becoming the normal situation for working people. The stereotype of the husband as the main breadwinner is in decline in Europe and is gradually being replaced by ideals of active fathering and equal sharing of care responsibilities (Brandth and Kvande 2003, Holter 2003, Puchert et al. 2005).

At the same time Europe is facing huge demographic challenges, which make care an even more important topic. These challenges are related to family reconciliation and fertility, but also to health care and care for elderly people. It is neither desirable (from a gender equality perspective) nor probable (from the perspective of ongoing changes) that care maintains the traditional female bias.

In some parts of Europe we can see positive changes among men: their private wishes, obligations and attitudes are undergoing great change, but work life is not keeping pace. Men still live in a state of preparedness for their jobs, women in a state of preparedness for the home (Lilleaas 2003). Hegemonic and traditional gender role models are still effective among men and women, in partnerships and, most of all, in the work sphere (Puchert et al. 2005).

EU-research (e.g.: Work Changes Gender, cf. Puchert et al. 2005) shows that male employees are more family- and care-oriented than earlier. However, development trends

in the post-industrial society appear to support the fact that some groups of men still are attracted to the breadwinner model. Many men let their jobs take precedence over the rest of their life. There are many reasons why men still linger in the sphere of work life. Men's strong identification with their work seems to be a cultural and symbolic solution that has its roots in traditional man's ideals where the father was the breadwinner. Men in general work more overtime compared to women. The breadwinner conduct can be understood as a structural phenomenon that is maintained in society and work life. The breadwinner model refers to deep-rooted masculinity and gender standards.

We have in this project chosen to focus on work life. In particular, we look at how work life affects men's opportunities to practice caring masculinities and examine ongoing shifts in men's work environment in Europe. We also focus on how the work environment interacts with changing masculinities and how this affects opportunities for gender equality. The project places emphasis on organisational cultures, and more specifically on the role of internal innovators in the process of gender changes.

Even though we start in the labour market and inside the companies, we see the work sphere and the private sphere as deeply inter-related. Changes in the labour market will necessarily affect the private sphere. This project aim to acquire more knowledge of what causes gender equality to remain only an ideal rather than something the managers put into action. With the intervening in companies and in the dialog with experts and innovators, the project aims to initiate change and encourage managers to move from an idealistic gender-equality discourse to a more action-oriented practice.

## ***1.2. National reports***

This report is one of five national reports. These national reports provide a brief introduction to the social conditions in each partner country before the analysis of the workplace studies.

Each of the five national partners has carried out qualitative workplace studies in two different companies, one private and one public. In these studies we have interviewed male employees and managers with emphasis on three main topics. These are their private lives, their experiences pertaining to work and their ideas concerning organisational measures for balancing work and private life.

The national reports describe the findings from those studies and suggest possible measures that can be developed on the organisational level within a company. The innovative aspect of this project is the most important one. Our main goal is to help provide good guidelines for what companies can do in this area.

In addition to the national reports there is a report on the European dimension of the project, written by adviser Mari Teigen at the Institute for Social Research in Oslo. This report compares the findings from the five national reports.

A website has been set up, where you will find more information on project partners, our final conference and links to the different reports. When the guidelines are developed, you will also find these posted online ([www.caringmasculinities.org](http://www.caringmasculinities.org)).



## 2. Conditions of the labour sphere

### 2.1 Legislation on work conditions

Although Iceland is one of Nordic countries and shares many of the social characteristics of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, there are a number of differences that matter in this context. One is that the Icelandic welfare system deviates from the Scandinavian one on a number of issues and leans towards the liberal model as these are defined in classical literature (Esping-Andersen 1990). According to Stefán Ólafsson (1999: 201-205) the main deviation is in a liberal use of negative relation of earnings to social benefits, meaning that those with middle or high income receive little or nothing from the welfare system. Unemployment benefits have for example not been related to former wages.

But in spite of this there are many similarities in the social sphere as for example in laws regarding the labour market. According to legislation, the working week in Iceland is 40 hours long but as will be shown later the reality is very different.

Employees in Iceland are unusually poorly protected compared to workers in the other Nordic countries. There are actually few limits on employers' allowances in dismissing their staff. The main exceptions are that shop stewards enjoy certain protection, as do pregnant women and parents on parental leave. According to law, these people cannot be terminated unless under very narrow conditions, and their termination must be supported. Other workers may be let go without reason.

Pregnant women enjoy certain protection according to the Act on Maternity/Paternity Leave and Parental Leave no. 95/2000. Aside from the fact that they may not be terminated after they have informed the employer of their pregnancy, they also enjoy increased protection in the work place. Art. 11 of the above named Act states:

*If the safety and health of a pregnant woman, a woman who has recently given birth to a child, or a woman who is breastfeeding a child, is considered to be in danger according to a special assessment, her employer shall make the necessary arrangements to ensure the woman's safety by temporarily changing her working conditions and/or working hours. If this is not possible for technical reasons, or other valid reasons, the woman's employer shall entrust her with other tasks; if this is not possible, he/she shall grant her leave of absence for the length of time necessary to protect her safety and health. ... Those changes which are considered necessary in a woman's working conditions and/or working time (cf. par. 1) shall not affect her wages so as to reduce them or abridge her other job-related rights.*

Provisions on the equality of women and men in the labour market can be found in the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men no. 96/2000. The Act emphasises, among other things, the equal rights of women and men to jobs and wages. It is prohibited to state a preference for either sex in job advertisements, and to discriminate in wages or other benefits. Employers are charged with certain obligations, including in art. 13, which states, among other things, that:

*Employers and labour unions shall make systematic efforts to equalize the status of the sexes in the labour market. Employers shall make specific efforts to promote that occupations are not categorized as specific women's jobs or men's jobs.*

*Companies and institutions employing more than 25 people shall prepare a programme on matters of equality or include specific provisions on gender equality in their personnel policy.*

In addition to these clauses, the legislation specifically addresses the possibility for the reconciliation of family and work life, based on the assumption that most people have both and that it is necessary for society as a whole that men and women are enabled to attend to both facets. Art. 16 address this issue:

*Employers shall take the necessary measures to enable women and men to reconcile their occupational and family obligations. Such measures shall, i.a., promote increased flexibility in organizing work and working hours, taking into account the needs of the labour market and the family situation of employees, i.a. making it easy for them to return to work after maternity/paternity leave or parental leave, or time off from work on grounds of force majeure for urgent family reasons.*

## **2.2 Legislation on parental leave**

As for parental leave the Icelandic laws regulating that aspect were dramatically changed in the year 2000 (Lög no. 95/2000). The main changes can be summarized in 13 points:

1. The total leave period was progressively extended from six to nine months
2. The mother has three months
3. The father has three months and those months came in steps, one month in 2001, two months in 2002 and three months in 2003
4. The parents can divide three months as they like
5. The months assigned to the father and the mother are non-transferable except if either parent dies before having made full use of his/her non-transferable three months
6. The parents can take the leave separately or together
7. The parents can, in cooperation with their employer, divide the leave into separate periods or use it with part-time work
8. The parental leave has to be used before the child reaches the age of 18 months
9. Employees are protected against dismissal after informing the employer that they intend to take parental leave
10. Parents who have been working full time receive compensation during the leave, which amounts to 80% of their salary. In the original law there was no “roof” on the payment but now a roof has been introduced so that those who earn over 600.000 ISK, receive only 80% of 600.000. This is a very high roof, affecting only about 1-2% of parents. On the other hand there has always been a “floor” meaning that if 80% of salary is lower than a certain minimum the sum is raised
11. Minimum labour market participation for receiving salary related payment is 25%
12. Students and people outside the labour force are entitled to a flat rate benefit if they have been living in Iceland for the past 12 months
13. The payments come from a Parental Leave Fund which is financed by a part of the insurance levy which all employers pay as part of the wages

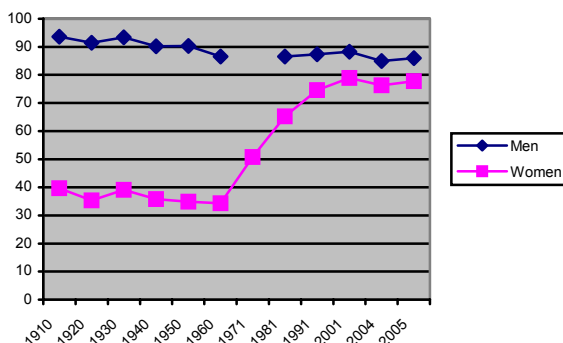
## **2.3 Statistics on employment and working hours**

In 2005, 81.9% of Icelanders aged 16-74 were active in the labour market, 86% of the men and 77.8% of the women. These numbers have been fairly constant in the last few years, although there are a bit fewer men active in the labour market in 2005 than there were in

1991, and a few more women. The participation of men has been around 90% for as long as we have reliable figures. The position of women on the other hand has been different. Figure 2.1 shows the development from 1910 to 2005.

**Figure 2.1 The labour market participation of Icelandic men and women (16-74 years old) 1910-2005**

Sources: Hagskinna and Statistics Iceland

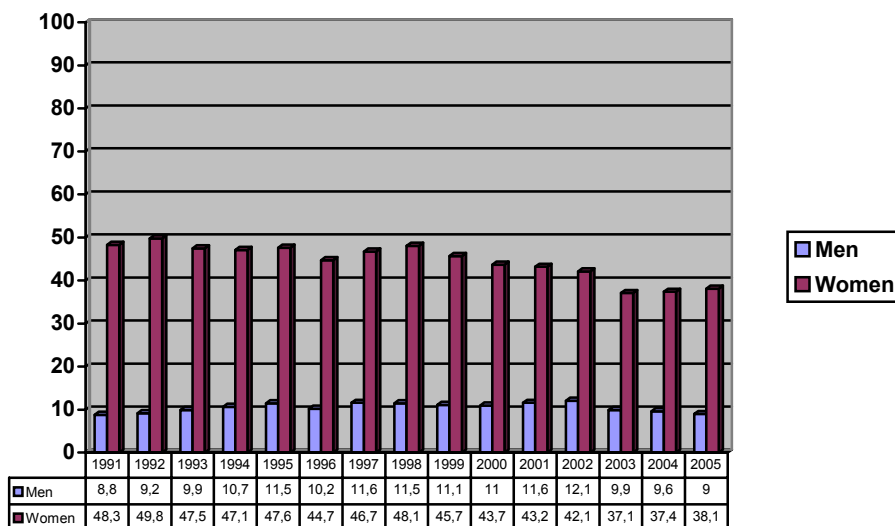


As is, Iceland has the highest labour participation rate of women in Europe as well as the highest overall participation on the labour market (Plantenga & Remery 2005: 27 and 28). It should also be noted that marriage status has no effect on participation. An equally high percentage of married and unmarried women are active on the labour market.

There is of course a difference between just participating on the labour market and the actual working hours. Men have always worked longer hours than women on the labour market but the difference has been decreasing over time. One of the reasons for the diminishing gap in working hours is that more women are now working full time. There has been a major difference between men and women in this regard and still is, but the gap has been (slowly) closing as figure 2.2 shows.

**Figure 2.2 Percentage of men and women working part time 1991-2004**

Source: Statistics Iceland

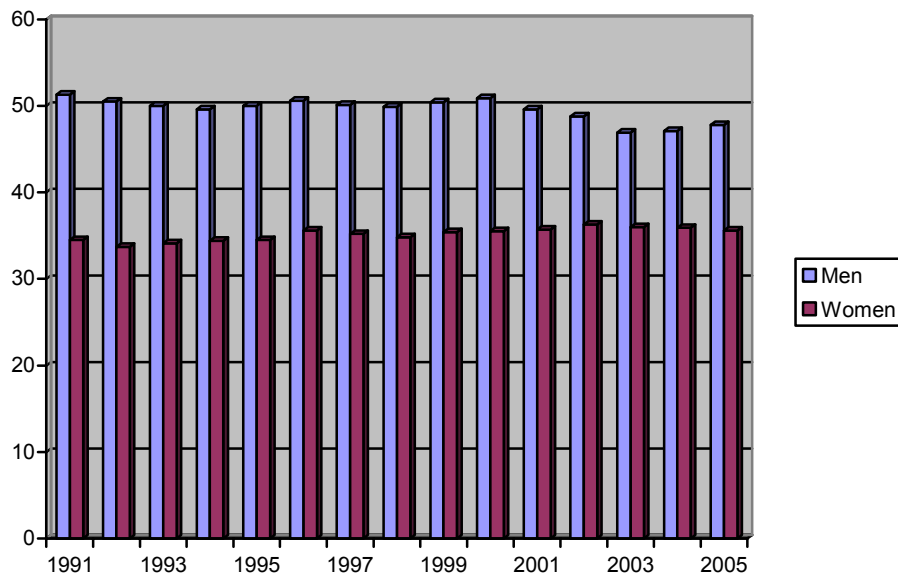


As can be seen in figure 2.2, the gap is mainly closing due a reduction in the number of women who work part-time while the number of men who do so has remained pretty much unchanged.

Icelanders work long hours compared to other nations. The average working week for those 16-74 years old and active in the labour market was 42.2 hours in 2005.<sup>1</sup> The total working hours for the Icelandic people have been going down. Men now work 3.5 hours less per week than they did in 1991. Women work 1.1 hour longer per week today than they did in 1991. So from a difference of 16.8 hours in the working week of men and women in 1991 we are down to 12.2 hours. This development is shown in figure 2.3.

**Figure 2.3 Working hours in Iceland 1991 to 2005**

Source: Statistics Iceland



What has caused the difference in the participation of men and women on the labour market becomes clearer if we consider the proportion of men and women working full-time related to the number of children in the household and concentrate on the age bracket when most people are active i.e. those between the ages of 24-54 years old. Then we see that children have an opposite effect on the working patterns of fathers and mothers.

**Table 2.1 Men and women (24-54 years old) working full time 1991 and 2002 related to the number of children in the household**

Source: Vinnumarkaður 2002

	Men 1991	Men 2002	Women 1991	Women 2002
<b>No child</b>	93.7	90.9	68.5	71.3
<b>One child</b>	96.2	96.8	58.2	66.2
<b>Two children or more</b>	96.4	95.9	32.9	50.0

The effects of having a child are particularly obvious for women. As the number of children increases the number of women working fulltime decreases. But it is highly noteworthy that while the figures for men hardly change at all between 1991 and 2002 the number of women working full time increased in all three groups and the increase is largest among those with two or more children. So we see that here the position of men and women is becoming increasingly similar mainly due to changes among women. This is in all

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that in Iceland, coffee breaks are counted in to the working hours. This is evidently not common elsewhere, and may serve to explain the long working day statistical reports indicate.

probability an effect of increased availability of public institutions for child care which relieve families in this area. A recent European research shows that it is just the public institutions that are the main explaining factor when women do not diminish their participation on the labour market after having their first child (Uunk, W. a.o. 2005).

**Table 2.2. Working hours for men and women (24-54 years old) 1991 and 2002 related to the number of children under the age of six in the household. Hours per week.**

Source: Vinnumarkaður 2002

	<b>Women 1991</b>	<b>Women 2002</b>	<b>Men 1991</b>	<b>Men 2002</b>
<b>No child</b>	36.7	37.8	51.7	48.0
<b>One child under the age of six</b>	34.4	34.5	53.9	50.6
<b>Two or more children where the youngest is under the age of six</b>	28.9	32.8	52.6	51.6

If we next look at the working hours of men and women in the ages 24-54 and relate that in the same way to the number of children in the household we see a similar pattern as regards part-time and full-time workers. The more children a man has, the longer are his working hours while the reverse is true for women. Table 2.2 shows this for 1991 and 2002.

The task of combining work and family life has obviously been mainly shouldered by women. They reduce their working hours to make it possible for family life to function (Lilja Mósesdóttir and Davíð Þór Björgvinsson 1998). But this "choice" could of course be based on the premise that the man will increase his working effort. However, important changes seem to be revealed in these figures.

All the groups of men have somewhat decreased their working hours while the women have increased their. It is a bit surprising that the men without children are the group that has decreased its working hours most, while among women it is the group with two or more children which has increased its working hours most.

This again means that the lives of men and women are more symmetrical in 2002 than they were in 1991. So on all accounts the differences between men and women on the labour market have diminished. This goes for participation in the labour market, full-time work and working hours.

A research done amongst those who became parents for the first time in 1997 showed the very different impact that this has on the lives of fathers and mothers. In the first place 45% of the mothers said that the pregnancy itself had an impact on their labour market activity, 21% had reduced their working hours while 24% had stopped working altogether. On the other hand, pregnancy had only influenced the labour market activity of less than 3% of the fathers.

After the birth almost all mothers stay out of the labour market for 6 months (the parental leave at that time). Only 7% have then returned to work. After that the percentage rises sharply so that 13 months after the birth, 57% of the new mothers are back on the labour market and 36 months after the birth the number has risen to 61%. This is though somewhat misleading as some women have a second child during this time. If we only look at those who don't then the labour market participation of the mothers is similar to what it was five months before the birth when the child is two years old, just over 70%.

As for the fathers just under 64% are active on the labour market in the first month after the birth but already in the second month their participation has risen to the pre-birth level. The working hours are long. 82% of the fathers work over 40 hours a week in the first

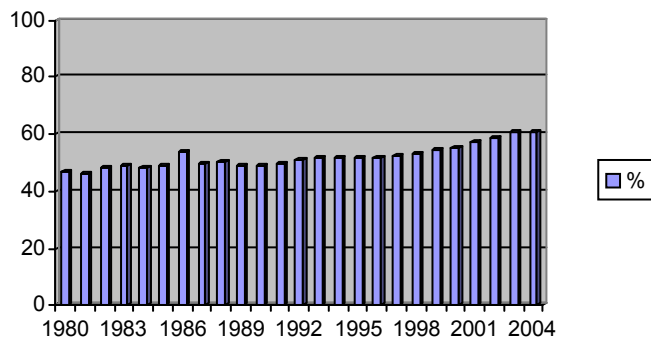
three months after the birth and 40% of those worked 51 hours a week or more (Guðný Björk Eydal 2004). This was when the economic compensation during parental leave was very low and that has probably encouraged or forced the fathers to work hard to compensate for the reduction in the mothers income.

## 2.4 Statistics on wages for men and women

When we come to the earning capacities of men and women it is a well-known fact in all Western countries that women earn less than men on the labour market. However, it is also well known that this is due to a number of factors, some clearly discriminatory, others less clearly so. Here I will first provide a figure showing the development of the women's earnings as percentage of men's earnings as revealed in taxes.

**Figure 2.4 Women's earnings as percentage of men's earnings 1980-2004**

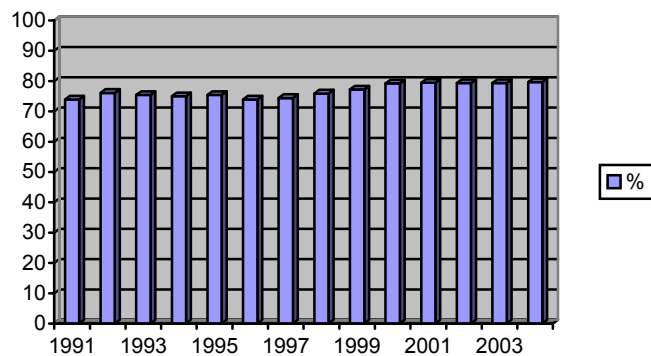
Source: Own calculations based on information from Statistics Iceland



As can be seen here the gap has been getting narrower in the last decades. Figure 2.5 shows what happens when the taxed income is related to working hours

**Figure 2.5. Wage gap in Iceland 1991-2004**

Source: Own calculations based on information from Statistics Iceland

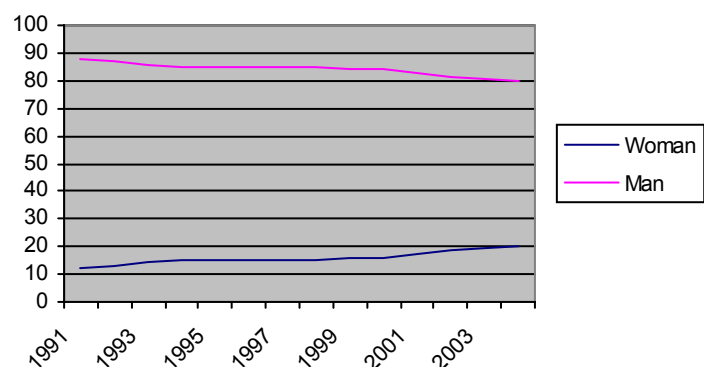


This shows a somewhat different picture, a picture of stagnation in the last few years.

Finally figure 2.6 shows the development as regards who is the main provider in a family i.e. the percentage of families where the man on the one hand, the woman on the other, earns more.

**Figure 2.6. Icelandic households where the woman or the man respectively earn more on the labour market**

Source: Own calculations based on information from Statistics Iceland



Again we are presented with the picture of a slow improvement, i.e. that more and more households where two adults are active on the labour market now have the woman as the main provider in the family. Here it should also be noted that the situation is somewhat different in the capital area (Reykjavik and neighboring towns) than in the rest of the country. In the capital area the woman is the main provider in 21.3% of families while outside the capital area the figure is 17.4%. A similar difference is noticeable in almost all areas; the position of women is better in the capital area than outside it.

In addition to these figures based on official statistics it should also be noted that a number of studies have been conducted on the wage differences of men and women taking into account a number of variables such as status within the company or municipality, education, experience on the labour market and so on. These have consistently showed a gender wage gap, which can only be explained as a result of discrimination. The figures have varied but most show a difference of around 14% as only explainable as discrimination against women.

## ***2.5 Statistics on leadership and boards***

Statistics on the status of women and men on the boards of companies in Iceland have only been collected and published in recent years. A recent publication by the Icelandic Statistical Bureau showed that in 2004 women accounted for 18% of managing directors and 22% of chairmen of boards of directors. The proportion of women in those positions is higher in small enterprises and decreases as the enterprises become larger. In 1999, 15% of enterprises had women as managing directors, but in 2004 the proportion had increased to 18%, mainly because of new enterprises. The share of female chairmen did not change during this period. Some 4,000 women were members of boards of directors compared to 12,000 of men in 2004 (Hagstofa Íslands 2005).

The most ambitious on-going project regarding gender and leadership in enterprises is the development of a gender index for businesses. The idea is that businesses can be ranked according to the status of gender equality within them. One report has been published by the project so far, with information on the 100 biggest businesses in Iceland, based on revenues in 2005 (Rannsóknasetur jafnréttis og vinnumarkaðsmála 2006).

The main results were as follows:

- Women held 12% of the seats on the boards (51 and 434 seats).
- Women were 10.5% of executives (43 women of 410 presidents and managers).
- 39% of the businesses had a written gender equality programme, 61% did not.
- No woman held a seat on the board of 55% of the businesses.
- Five women were directors of the boards of businesses, or 5% of the chairmen.
- In five businesses women held more than 50% of the seats on the boards, or in 5% of the businesses. Women were chairmen of the boards of two of these businesses.

Women held less than 6% of the seats on the boards of businesses on the Icelandic Stock Exchange's main list. Thereof, one woman was the chairman of the board.

## ***2.6 Statistics on gender-specific types of employment***

The Icelandic labour market is still highly gender segregated in spite of some attempts to change that through education and campaigns. The changes that have been happening in the last years have mainly been that women have entered traditional male fields. The gender composition in traditional female fields (caring for and educating children,

nursing) has remained pretty much unchanged. The gender segregation showed in a recent Gallup poll where 65% of the respondents said that they worked in a place where their own sex was comprised at least 2/3 of the workforce (Gallup 2003).

## 2.7 Statistics on parental leave

Generally speaking the reform of the parental law in 2000 has been a huge success. The political consensus has been complete and opinion polls show that Icelanders generally support it. The only major surprise has been how easily and willingly Icelandic men have adapted to the changed circumstances. In fact, one of the main reasons why a roof had to be introduced and the insurance levy (or pay roll tax) raised somewhat in 2004 was that many more men used the parental leave than had been expected so that the Parental Leave Fund was rapidly becoming empty. With the changes in the law the fund is now sustainable.

The new Act on maternity/paternity leave and parental leave from 2000, as described above, has had a huge impact on the status of men and women in relation to the birth of a child. Table 2.3 addresses some issues concerning men's and women's uptake of benefits.

**Table 2.3. The use of the maternity – paternity leave**

	2001	2002	2003	2004
Applications from fathers <sup>2</sup>	82.4%	83.6%	86.6%	89.8%
Average number of days used by fathers <sup>3</sup>	39	68	97	96
Average number of days used by mothers <sup>4</sup>	186	187	183	182
Number of fathers using more than their basic right <sup>5</sup>	484 or 14.5%	472 or 13.9%	584 or 16.1%	657 or 17.1%
Number of mothers using more than their basic right <sup>6</sup>	3,819 or 94.2%	3,798 or 93.4%	3,811 or 90.9%	3,883 or 90.5%
Number of fathers using less than their basic right	161 or 5.1%	342 or 10.1%	516 or 14.2%	689 or 17.9%
Number of mothers using less than their basic right	36 or 0.9%	31 or 0.8%	42 or 1.0%	48 or 1.1%
Percentage of fathers taking all of the leave in one package <sup>7</sup>	45.2%	21.2%	13.7%	11.8%
Percentage of mothers taking all of the leave in one package	71.0%	63.8%	45.7%	50.1%

Around 88% of fathers use their right in whole or in part, the average number of days that they use is 97 while the average number of days for mothers is 183. Around 16% of fathers use some part of the three months that the parents can divide while around 90% of the mothers do that. About 14% of the fathers do not make use of all the time allotted to them but only about 1% of the mothers. More and more of the parents divide the leave in one way or another (86.3% of the fathers and 54.3% of the mothers in 2003) but unfortunately we still do not have information regarding how they divide it.

While the changes have obviously meant that more Icelandic fathers than ever before are actively involved in the care of infants, it was also hoped that the changes would contribute to enhancing the position of women on the labour market. The idea was that when employers could expect men as well as women to take leave for family reasons, it would mean that women would not experience the same discrimination as before. Even though it

<sup>2</sup> I.e. applications from men as percentage of applications from women

<sup>3</sup> Only those who have been on the labour market

<sup>4</sup> Only those who have been on the labour market

<sup>5</sup> I.e. the percentage of men using more than their basic right, one month in 2001, two months in 2002 and three months in 2003

<sup>6</sup> Three months

<sup>7</sup> The leave can either be taken all in one package or divided in different ways



is too early to say anything definite about the success here we do have indications that the labour market position of men and women is becoming more similar.

Aside from the fact that fathers and mothers are availing themselves of their right to parental leave, it is still unclear today how they choose to do so. That is to say, we do not know how much time the parents spend at home together and how they bridge the gap between maternity/paternity leave and day care. Most likely, the parents take some leave together and it also appears that the mother does not return to work immediately after the end of her leave, or that she goes back to work part time. These are, however, only assumptions, as no data is available on the topic.

One qualitative study has been conducted on Icelandic couples, where the man has taken some of the shared leave (Ingólfur V. Gíslason 2005). The main results of that study were that the mother's status in the work place was the most significant factor behind the couple's decision to "let" the father use some or all of the sharable months. If the mother worked as a contractor, had her own business or held a top management position she might conclude that it would be difficult for her to be away from work for an extended period of time. This, in turn, would open possibilities for negotiations within the family that otherwise would not be considered. That is to say, under these circumstances, the possibility that the father stays at home for a longer period of time, taking some or all of the shared leave, becomes a realistic one. This is consistent with Nordic studies, which indicate that the status of the mother in the labour market is a significant factor in the father's use of his rights to paternity leave (Brandth and Kvande 2003; Christoffersen 1990 and 1998).

Even though the new laws on parental leave were a major change in Icelandic social structure it is highly interesting to note that before the change many employees had received some sort of support from their employers when becoming a parent. Among those who became first-time parents in 1997 44% of the mothers and 30% of the fathers had received some support. The most frequently mentioned were reduced hours (mothers), increased flexibility and summer holiday when it was most convenient (fathers and mothers) 19% of the mothers and 9% of the fathers were paid a salary while on leave even though this was neither a legal right nor in agreements with the unions (Guðný Björk Eydal, 1995).

### 3. Conditions of the non-labour sphere

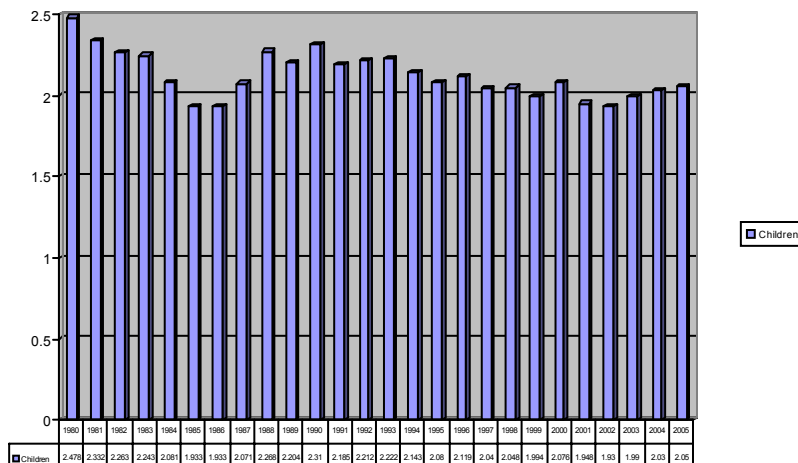
#### 3.1. Statistics on reproductive arrangements

Figure 3.1 shows the development of the fertility rate in Iceland since 1980.

Considering trends in this development, it is evident that the fertility rate is considerably lower at the end of this period than at its beginning, although there are some notable swings within it.

**Figure 3.1. Icelandic Women's Fertility Rate 1980-2005**

Source: Statistics Iceland



It was some surprise to the author to find that there are far more pronounced swings in the fertility rate than were expected. The fertility rate is at its highest from 1988-1993 and the question is whether this can be related to swings in the economy or whether a completely different explanation can be found.

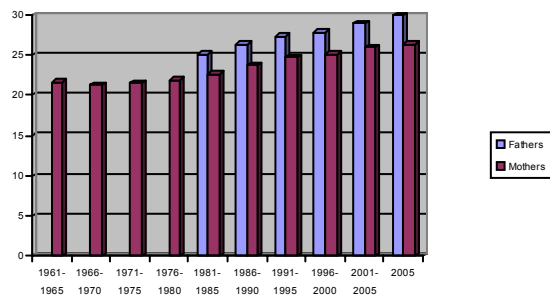
It appears that Icelanders are having a bit fewer children than they feel is desirable. The quality of life survey in 1990 asked about the desirable number of children. In 1984, the average was 2.9 children but in 1990 it was 3.1 children. The number of those who felt that more than two children were optimal had grown; the greatest number of people said three was the optimal number (49% in 1984 and 54% in 1990) (Friðrik H. Jónsson and Stefán Ólafsson 1991, p. 62). No similar question has been asked since.

The fertility rate has twice dropped to 1.93 live births per woman (in 1985/6 and 2002) but has increased in the last years and is now at 2.05, which is enough to sustain the population. Also, this is the highest fertility rate in Europe, aside from Turkey (Plantenga & Remery 2005: 31). The most likely explanation for the upswing in the last year is the new Act on maternity/paternity leave and parental leave. There are two main foundations for that argument. One is that the economic position of those having children now is much better than that of those who had children before 2000, as payments are now connected to earned income. The second is that research, for example in Austria (Buber, Isabella 2002) and Sweden and Hungary (Oláh, Livia Sz. 2003), has demonstrated that the father's participation in caring for the first child has significant impact on the woman's decision whether to have more children. If he is inactive, she is less likely to want more children. It is quite likely that more Icelandic fathers than ever are active in caring for their children, now that the parental leave has been divided between the mother and father.

Parents' age at the birth of their first child has been increasing, as can be seen in figure 3.2.

**Figure 3.2 First-time Icelandic parents' age 1961-2005**

Source: Statistics Iceland

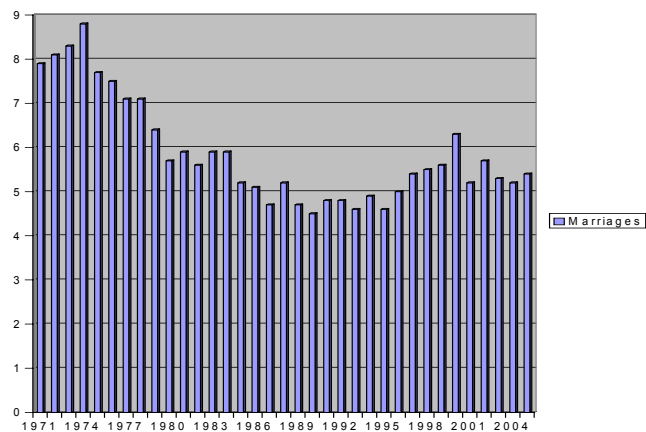


Women's average age at the birth of their first child was a little over 21 years until the 1980s, but is now a little over 26 years. The age of the father was not registered until 1981 (!) at which time it was 24.6 years, but by 2005 it had gone up to 30 years. The leap between 2004 and 2005 is unusually large, or 1.1. year, and the present author does not have an explanation for it.

Figure 3.3 shows the number of weddings per 1000 inhabitants in Iceland from 1971-2005

**Figure 3.3 Weddings per 1.000 inhabitants in Iceland 1971-2005**

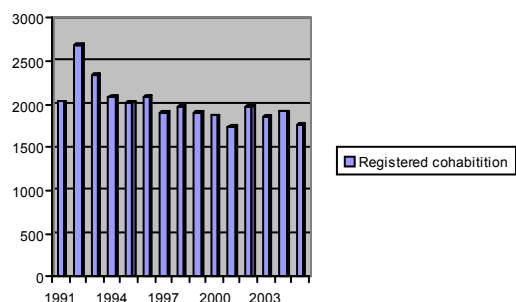
Source: Statistics Iceland



As can be seen, these numbers are subject to fairly large swings, but they have been increasing over the last decade or so. Since cohabitation is a very common first step towards marriage, and often remains the only form of cohabitation for couples, this must also be taken into account. Figure 3.4 indicates the registration of cohabitation from 1991-2005.

**Figure 3.4 Registered cohabitation in Iceland 1991-2005**

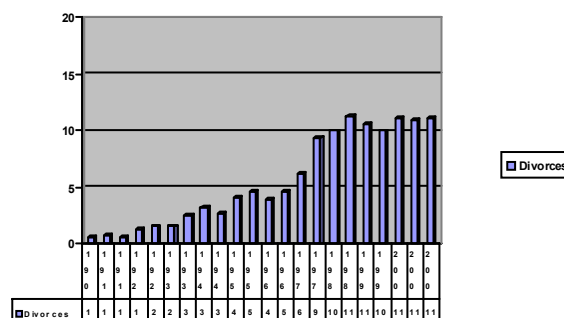
Source: Statistics Iceland



Public discourse often suggests that the divorce rate is going up. Numbers from the Icelandic Statistical Bureau counter that generally held belief, showing a significant increase in divorce in the 1960s, but thereafter the rate has remained fairly constant. The divorce rate, looking at five year intervals, is shown in the following figure:

**Figure 3.5 Divorces per 1000 couples 1904-2005**

Source: Statistics Iceland

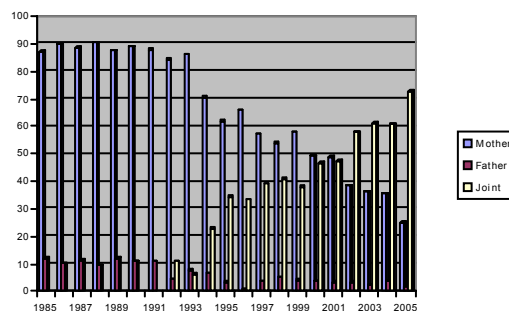


The greatest change is in the 1960s and 1970s, in conjunction with the large-scale entry of mothers into the labour market and the collectivization of child-rearing. The last two decades have not seen significant changes, although the divorce rate has gone up a little bit.

119 same-sex couples have registered their cohabitation from the time this became a legal possibility in 1996. In 2004, 22 of these couples had terminated their cohabitation.

Looking at the trends for the last few years, as regards child custody after divorce, we can see that the main characteristic is the increase in the number of people taking advantage of joint custody. This can be seen in table 3.1.

**Figure 3.6 Custody of Children after Divorce<sup>8</sup>**



As can be seen, there has been a significant increase in joint custody since it became an option in Icelandic legislation in 1992 and now almost 75% of parents take that option. At the same time, there has been a significant reduction in the number of instances where the father has sole custody after divorce. Yet, this only tells half the story. While the custody may be shared, the child must maintain legal residence with one of the parents, who then gets the legal status of a single parent. The development of children's legal residence has been as below:

**Table 3.1 Children's legal residence after parents' divorce**

Year	Number of children under joint custody	Legal residence with mother (%)	Legal residence with father (%)
1994	119	103 (86.6)	16 (13.4)
1995	176	143 (81.3)	33 (18.8)
1996	189	163 (86.2)	26 (13.8)
1997	214	183 (85.5)	31 (14.5)
1998	213	191 (89.7)	22 (10.3)
1999	205	175 (85.4)	30 (14.6)
2000	298	249 (83.6)	49 (16.4)
2001	338	294 (87.0)	44 (13.0)

<sup>8</sup> Landshagir and Statistics Iceland homepage. Joint custody may be underestimated for the years 1992 and 1993

The numbers fluctuate somewhat (10.3%-18.8% maintaining legal residence with the father) but the main thing to note here is that the proportion of children getting legal residence with their father under joint custody agreements is much higher than the proportion of fathers getting sole custody.

Taking together the number of children in sole custody and the legal residence of children in joint custody, we see the following trend:

**Table 3.2 Legal residence of children following divorce**

Year	Number of children	Legal residence with mother (%)	Legal residence with father (%)
1994	523	472 (90.2)	51 (9.8)
1995	513	460 (89.7)	51 (9.9)
1996	569	538 (94.6)	31 (5.4)
1997	545	494 (90.6)	51 (9.4)
1998	521	472 (90.6)	49 (9.4)
1999	540	488 (90.4)	52 (9.6)
2000	636	562 (88.4)	73 (11.5)
2001	701	633 (90.3)	68 (9.7)

Aside from one exception (1996), the proportion of children maintaining legal residence with their fathers after divorce is fairly constant at around 10%. If we thus add the instances of fathers' sole custody and the instances of joint custody with the child having legal residence with the father, we can see that the changes in the percentage living mainly with their father are not significant.

It should be emphasized here that this only covers those instances where the parents' have been married and get divorced. Statistics Iceland has recently started publishing data on the custody of children after the termination of cohabitation, providing information as far back as 1991:

**Table 3.3 Custody of Children after Termination of Cohabitation<sup>9</sup>**

Year	Total number of children	Custody to the mother %	Custody to the father %	Joint custody %	Custody to others %
1991	569	96.7	3.3		
1992	521	86.2	3.5	8.6	1.7
1993	559	81.2	1.8	16.5	0.5
1994	591	65.3	2.9	31.0	0.8
1995	667	50.5	0.6	47.5	1.3
1996	666	53.5	1.7	43.7	1.2
1997	790	47.8	1.9	49.9	0.4
1998	699	44.3	0.7	54.6	0.3
1999	674	42.3	1.2	55.8	0.7
2000	633	39.7	1.1	58.5	0.8
2001	787	30.9	1.7	67.5	0.0
2002	682	29.0	0.9	69.9	0.1
2003	693	26.6	0.9	72.6	0.0
2004	577	22.9	0.7	75.9	0.5
2005	539	24.3	0.9	74.0	0.7

<sup>9</sup> Landshagir og heimasíða Hagstofunnar.

The best picture of the development (or lack thereof) of single parenting may be seen by simply viewing the development of single mothers and single fathers in proportion to the total number of single parents in Iceland. The proportion of single fathers in Iceland has been around 7% since the 1960s.

**Table 3.4 Single parents in Iceland from 1965**

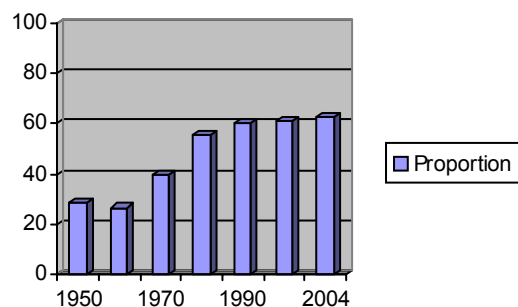
Year	Number of single parents	Father with children	Mother with children	Proportion of fathers
1965	3,814	261	3,553	6.8%
1970	4,497	273	4,224	6.1%
1975	5,325	284	5,041	5.3%
1980	5,744	332	5,412	5.8%
1985	6,727	453	6,274	6.7%
1990	7,837	553	7,284	7.1%
1991	8,181	552	7,629	6.7%
1992	8,154	531	7,623	6.5%
1993	7,572	508	7,064	6.7%
1994	7,747	517	7,230	6.7%
1995	7,874	506	7,368	6.4%
1996	8,078	515	7,563	6.4%
1997	8,783	587	8,196	6.7%
1998	9,132	589	8,543	6.4%
1999	9,930	720	9,210	7.3%
2000	10,764	839	9,925	7.8%
2001	11,235	841	10,394	7.5%
2002	11,508	877	10,631	7.6%
2003	11,901	895	11,006	7.5%
2004	12,073	909	11,164	7.5%
2005	12,204	961	11,243	7.9%

### 3.2 Statistics on education amongst men and women

The last decades have seen great changes in the educational achievements of men and women. Figure 3.6 shows the proportion of women of high school graduates 1950 till 2004.

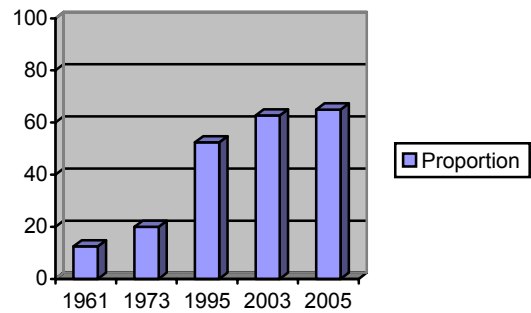
**Figure 3.7 Women graduating from Icelandic high schools 1950 – 2004**

Source: Statistics Iceland



The next figure shows the proportion of women graduating from The University of Iceland 1961-2005.

**Figure 3.8 Women's share of graduates from the University of Iceland**  
Source: Statistics Iceland

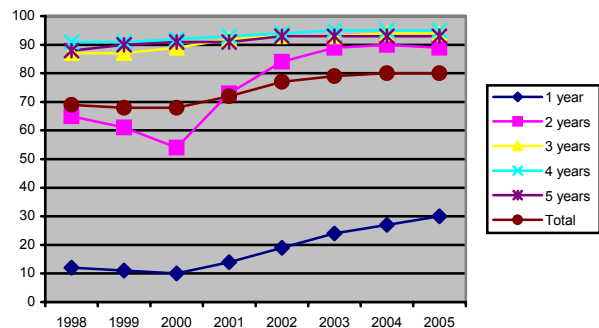


### 3.3 Statistics of child care

The development of public childcare facilities really took off in Iceland in the 1970s following the dramatic increase in the number of mothers active on the labour market. It is now a stated policy of most municipalities to provide good playschools (as the facilities are named in Iceland, acknowledging the important role of play in the learning of children) for all children between the ages of two and five. Elementary school starts when the child is in its sixth year.

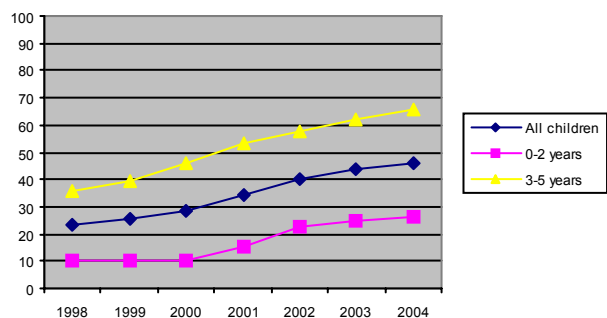
The development in the collectivization of childcare has been rapid in the last decades. In 1981 9% of all Icelandic children two years and younger had a place in playschool. In 2004 the figure was 39%. As for children between the ages of three and five, the figures were 52% in 1981 and 94% in 2004 (Konur og karlar 1975-2005). In the last few years the development has been fast both as regards places for the youngest children and the length of the time they spend in playschools each day. This is shown in figures 3.8 and 3.9.

**Figure 3.9 Percentage of children in playschools 1998 – 2005**  
Source: Statistics Iceland



In principal all Icelandic children two years and older now have the possibilities to a place in a playschool and over a fourth of those who are one year have a place. And they spend more and more time in the playschool.

**Figure 3.10 Percentage of children in playschools who spend eight hours or more there every day 1998 – 2005**  
Source: Statistics Iceland



There also exists the possibility of so-called “child minders” meaning individuals who take children into their home for care during the daytime. This has sharply declined in Iceland over the last years as the possibility for playschool has increased. Nowadays the child-minders (almost exclusively women) mostly take care of very young children who can’t get a place in playschools.

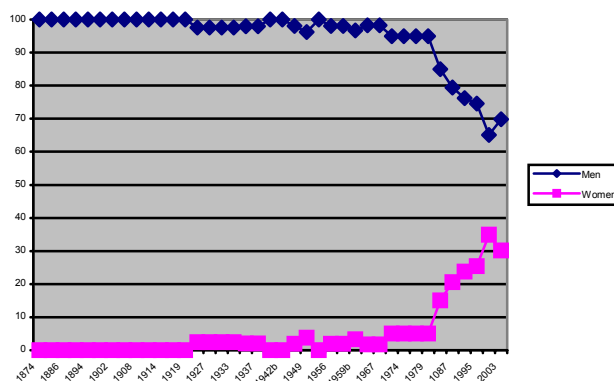
### 3.4 Statistics on men and women in political positions

As in most other western countries women were very few in the Icelandic legislative ensemble, Althing, for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They received the right to vote and run for office in 1916 but decades passed without this having any impact on the gender composition of Althing.

The main part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only one or no woman held a seat in Althing in Iceland. The change began in 1983, when the Women’s List ran for parliament. Subsequently, women’s numbers in parliament grew steadily until 2003, when we see something of a backlash. Currently, women are one third of the ministers in government.

**Figure 3.11 Proportion of men and women in Althing from 1874 to 2003**

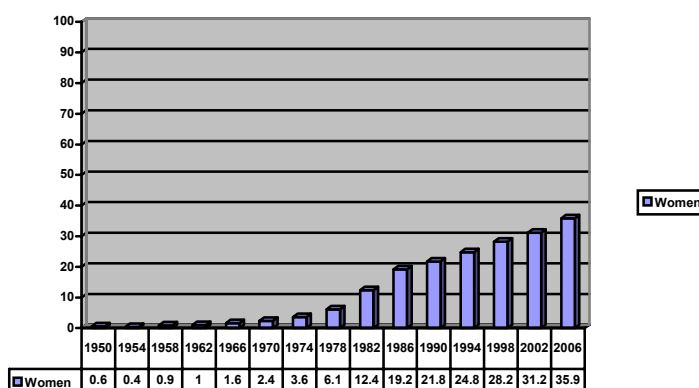
Source: Statistics Iceland



When it comes to municipal elections, the development has been similar to that in parliament, although we have not seen a backlash in the municipal arena.

**Figure 3.12 Women’s share in municipal elections 1950-2006 (percentage)**

Source: Statistics Iceland



### 3.5 Statistics on time use

How Icelanders really make use of their time is a little mapped territory. We have had around six studies in the last decades where this aspect has been in focus. However, the methodology and the questions have never been the same so that it is difficult to try to see any development. In what follows I will concentrate on the last three studies, one made in 1988, one made in 2000 and one made in 2003.



The first one was a general study on living conditions in Iceland (Stefán Ólafsson 1990). Two thousand Icelanders between the ages of 16 and 75, randomly selected from the national register were interviewed face to face about various aspects of their lives, one of which had to do with the division of household tasks.

The results were in no way surprising. Men spent an average of 6 hours a week on household tasks while women spent 19 hours. But it should be added that when you put together paid and unpaid labour then men and women work similar hours, the difference being that men get paid for much more of their work than women.

This was the only question that directly asked about time use. When it came to individual tasks the questions were of this kind: “How large a share of x do you usually do? All of it, 3/4, 1/2, 1/4, nothing?” Table 1 shows the results:

**Table 3.5 Division of household tasks in Iceland in 1988**

	All of it		3/4		1/2		1/4		Nothing	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>Cooking</b>	2.3	55.0	3.1	17.2	11.8	12.1	32.0	8.0	50.4	7.5
<b>Dishwashing</b>	3.4	35.8	5.4	18.2	24.0	30.6	39.8	10.7	26.5	4.0
<b>Cleaning</b>	1.6	46.9	2.4	22.0	14.1	17.6	41.2	10.5	40.2	2.8
<b>Washing and taking care of clothes</b>	2.7	68.3	1.3	9.5	5.5	10.5	17.3	6.1	72.8	5.5
<b>Daily shopping</b>	5.5	44.7	6.2	14.7	25.1	23.0	24.5	7.1	38.3	10.4
<b>House mending</b>	45.9	4.7	10.1	1.6	8.4	10.7	12.2	15.5	17.7	62.4
<b>Car mending</b>	45.4	2.4	6.9	0.4	9.6	3.7	10.6	7.1	21.3	79.3

The division of the tasks is pretty traditional with women taking care of the household except when it comes to repairing and maintaining the house and the car which is allotted to men. By far the largest difference is in regard to the clothes where almost 73% of the men say that there they do nothing.

The second study was a survey made by Gallup in June 2000. The main topic of the study was the balance between work life and family life and how one influences the other (Gallup 2000). 1158 randomly selected Icelanders answered an extensive list of questions through telephone.

The results regarding working hours were that men spent 50.6 hours a week in paid labour and women 37.5 hours. On the other hand men spent 10.01 hour a week in household work while women used 18.69 hours. This means that men do 34% of the household work and also that when paid and unpaid labour is taken together men work about four hours longer than women each week.

Two other results should be mentioned here. On the one hand men have more flexible working hours on the labour market than women and men also experience more possibilities regarding flexibility between work and family life than women do. This means that they should in principle be better able than women to make changes necessary to successfully combine work and family life. But it is also possible that the reason why they think they have better opportunities is that they make little use of it and therefore are less likely to have encountered opposition. Secondly women are more stressed than men mainly due to less flexibility.

The third and last survey that will be mentioned here is another Gallup survey, this one made in September and October 2003 (Gallup 2003). The main objective was to

investigate opinions on gender equality. Here the questions regarding housework centered on responsibility rather than worked hours.

**Table 3.6 Are you more responsible for housework than your spouse?**

	Much more		Slightly more		Equal		Slightly less		Much less	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>Housework in general</b>	2.1	47.8	0.4	20.2	57.9	30.8	21.0	1.2	18.5	00.0

Then respondents were also asked who was generally responsible for specific tasks in the household

**Table 3.7 Who was usually responsible for the following tasks in the last 6 months?**

	I		My spouse		Equal		Someone else	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>Cooking</b>	16.0	68.3	51.7	8.9	20.1	12.3	12.2	10.5
<b>Dishwashing</b>	22.0	47.0	25.0	14.0	43.0	29.0	10.0	11.0
<b>Cleaning</b>	11.0	62.0	43.0	4.0	35.0	25.0	11.0	10.0
<b>Washing</b>	8.0	78.0	64.0	4.0	16.0	9.0	11.0	9.0
<b>Shopping</b>	16.0	51.0	30.0	8.0	43.0	31.0	10.0	9.0
<b>House- and car mending</b>	81.0	14.0	1.0	64.0	6.0	11.0	12.0	11.0
<b>Contact with playschool and school personal</b>	12.0	53.0	39.0	4.0	35.0	31.0	14.0	12.0
<b>Child minding</b>	6.0	48.0	34.0	2.0	47.0	40.0	14.0	10.0

Two things stand out. On the one hand, women are to a higher degree responsible for all household work than men except for mending the house and the car. Secondly the evaluation of men and women is rather different with men tending to think that the division is more equal than women are prepared to say. The greatest difference is again in washing and the mending and maintenance of the house and the car.

As I stated previously it is impossible to compare these surveys so it is really not possible to say anything about the development in Iceland in this regard. It does seem logical though to expect things to be heading in a similar direction in Iceland as in the other Nordic countries. Three of them have recently completed extensive time use studies and according to them around 40% of the housework is shouldered by men (Lausten, M. & Sjörup, K. 2003; Vaage, Odd Frank 2002; SCB 2003)

It should be noted here that opinion polls indicate that on the whole the population thinks that it is often difficult to reconcile employment and family responsibilities. Gallup has at least twice, in 1999 and in 2006 asked about this aspect. In 1999 over half (52%) of the respondents said that employers show little or no consideration when it comes to the family responsibilities of employees (Vogin 1999). In 2006 71% of the respondents said that work and family responsibilities were sometimes irreconcilable. However, it seems that respondents were now a bit more satisfied with the attitudes of employers even though it is difficult to say anything certain here since the questions were phrased differently. But only 6% said that employers showed no consideration for family responsibilities. 34% said that they were equally considerate of the family needs of men and women, 57% that they showed more consideration to women and 3% that they showed more consideration to men (Þjóðarpúls Gallup 2006).

## **4. Selected companies**

### ***4.1 Short presentation of the companies***

The Icelandic participants in the survey are both staid participants in Icelandic society. The business is one of the oldest operating industrial companies in Iceland, but has undergone significant changes in the last decades. The changes have not least been that it has been handed over from the family that owned from beginning and over to the private market. Additionally, the business has changed from being primarily a manufacturing firm, to an importer and distributor.

The business employs about 130 individuals, which makes it a large company on an Icelandic scale. Its production is both for domestic consumption and export.

Around 75% of the employees are men, 6 of the 8 managers are men and 10 of 13 in middle management. The average work week among the employees is 42 hours, although it is nearer to 50 hours per week for management. 99% of the employees belong to a union, and very few women (2-3) have part time jobs (and no man).

According to information from management, gender equality as regards wages is emphasized within the company, which has a set gender equality programme. It is actually obliged to do so according to the Act on Equal Status and Equal Rights of Women and Men, but according to a survey done in 2004, less than 1/3 of businesses had fulfilled that obligation. On the other hand, management states that there are no specific policies in place to enable men to reconcile family and occupational responsibilities.

The public institution is one of Iceland's oldest service institutions, and while some changes have occurred in the last years and decades, particularly as regards increased competition, the institution's general nature remains the same. The institution employs 326 people, meaning that it is quite large in Iceland. 60% of the employees are male, as are 7 of 8 in top management, 18 of 24 in middle management and 3 of 7 in lower management. It is impossible to estimate the average work week for the employees, but 3 men are among the 30 employees in part time positions. Turnaround is rather limited, the average tenure with the institution is a little less than 13 years and 95% of the employees belong to a union.

According to information from management, the institution emphasizes gender equality as regards wages and operates according to a set gender equality programme. There are, however, no specific measures in place to foster caring masculinities and it varies between divisions whether staff is offered the option of working from home, flexible hours or a part time job for some time. There are also no measures in place to make it easier for people to tend to their children, nor to increase the number of men taking paternity leave. All of the men are evidently using their rights to paternity leave.

### ***4.2 Key informants***

I interviewed a total of five individuals within the business, two managers and three employees. As it happened, both of the members of the management team were university educated women and the three men also have university education and work in the businesses offices. We made deliberate attempts to find someone who works in manufacturing, but to no avail. The main reason was that the potential candidates did not meet the requirement of having a spouse who works full-time. This is, nonetheless,

interesting information, raising the question whether part-time work is primarily a class issue in Iceland; that it is mostly in families with relatively limited education where the woman works part-time. However, it is a major flaw in the business study, that all of the informants are university educated and working in an office.

Both of the managers of course work full time and significant overtime, 6-10 hours per week for one and 15-20 hours for the other. One is cohabiting with 5 family members, the other is divorced with 2 teenagers. They believe they spend 20 hours per week on household chores and have about 10 hours of free time each week.

Two of the employees are in their forties and one in his thirties. Ari (all names have been changed) has been with the business for almost 20 years. He is married and has two children. He and his wife both work full-time; he works a few hours of overtime each week (5-7 hours) but she doesn't. He has a significantly higher income than she does. The only thing he takes advantage of, as far as reconciliation of family and work life is concerned, is working from home. Also, he tries to go home at lunch to see his children and tend to them.

Bjarni has been with the business for about a decade. He is married with two children. He and his wife both work full-time. She rarely works overtime, whereas he works an average of three hours per week of overtime. She has significantly higher wages than he does. He has good possibilities for flexible working hours and has taken advantage of those, both for family and recreational use.

Davíð has been with the business for three years. He is married with two children. His wife currently works half-time, but when their younger child enters day care in the fall, they expect her to return to a full-time position. He works about 10 hours of overtime each week and has significantly higher wages than his wife. He has taken advantage of the possibility of working from home and has taken a (brief) paternity leave.

None of the informants felt they had specific caring responsibilities towards anyone other than their spouse and children.

With the institution I also interviewed five people, two in management and three general employees. One of the management members was a woman, all the other informants were men. Three of the informants have university educations. All work full time and about 10 hours of overtime in addition to that. Their tenure with the institution ranged from 0.3 years to 35 years. One of the managers lived only with a spouse as the children had formed families of their own. In the other instance, there were two children living in the home. With the general employees, there were three, four and one children remaining in the household.

Einar is in his thirties, has been with the institution for eight years. He has a university education, is married and has a total of three children, including one from a previous relationship. That child spends significant time in the household and has extensive communications with his father. The spouse is a teacher, who works full-time and about 10 hours of overtime each week. She earns about half of what he does. He feels the household chores are fairly evenly divided between them and distribution is somewhat unconventional, as his wife takes care of maintenance but he does cleaning and laundry. The only thing he has taken advantage of as far as reconciling family and work life is to work a tight week and flexible hours. He has also taken paternity leave.

Finnur is in his forties and currently works as little overtime as possible after having had a job where he had to work a lot of overtime. He has a high school education, cohabitates with 4-5 children in the home. His wife has a university education and operates her own business. He believed she worked an average of 15 hours of overtime each week. His salary is about three times higher than hers and he believes she spends 20 hours per week on household chores as compared to his 10. He has only taken advantage of the option of working from home, but he has taken paternity leave.

Gunnar is in his forties, and has been with the institution for six years. He frequently works some overtime, but not much. He has a secondary school education, living with a woman with whom he has one child. He also has two children from a previous relationship. His wife also has a secondary school education and works full-time. She does not work overtime. She earns quite a bit more than he does. He believes the household chores are evenly divided, but she spends more time with the baby since he works irregular hours. He has taken advantage of a number of the family oriented options, including paid leave due to illness of children and others, working a tight week, taken an unpaid leave of absence and paternity leave.

None of the informants felt they had specific caring responsibilities to others than spouse and children, but three of these informants have children not living with them full-time.

All of the informants, both in the business and institution, placed a significant emphasis on their family life. Free time not used with the family was limited and they did not seem to desire that very much. Work was certainly not just a way to make a living, they all seemed to enjoy their work and have an ambition to do well there. But the main thing in their mind was that the family did well, that they have time to spend with the family, play with children and participate in their lives, cooking together or simply being together. They try to limit their work and Finnur actually switched jobs because of the pressure and the fact that he felt there was limited or no consideration in his old workplace for the fact that employees had a family.

## 5. The workplace study

### 5.1 Findings from the interviews

The informants that had been with the business the longest felt it was certain that the pressure had been growing in the past few years. The pace is faster and demands to employees are higher. One of the informants went so far as to say that the situation today is a world apart from what it was just a few years ago. Actually, he seemed to feel that the change in ownership had resulted in little other than cuts in employees and increased pressure on those remaining. Here it should be emphasized that only office workers were interviewed, and when the question was raised whether the pressure had increased more there than in manufacture, most people seemed to believe that was the case. Also, there has been a fairly frequent change in ownership and a number of the informants said this had a generally negative impact on the morale in the workplace. People were generally fearful about their position and under such circumstances restlessness and negativity fester.

It became clear that turnaround was quite high within the business, mostly resulting from two things. On the one hand, the pressure is very high and people had limited tolerance for it except for a short time. On the other hand, the business has a policy of recruiting top managers from the outside, so opportunities for advancement were actually limited within the business.

Generally the informants were content with their co-workers and the morale within the business. People were happy to be there, they related to the business and there is a sense of team spirit. This also has the impact that jobs are in high demand, the business has a positive image in the minds of Icelanders, possibly as its products relate to positive events in most people's lives.

On the whole, there is a flat management and what is called an "open door policy" with the business, meaning that everybody has access to everybody else. This is one way to maintain a family feeling within the business; everybody is working towards its success and should be happy about the place they work in. Furthermore, everybody should feel that the managers' doors are open if there are any problems, within the business or in life outside of it.

The managers emphasize how important it is to the business that employees are as happy as possible in their lives outside of work. Therefore, it is important for the business to meet the employees' needs. "If you have a crisis at home, you're only half of a worker," as one of the managers put it. But alongside this, there is an emphasis on an individualized approach to solutions, rather than using general rules or a rights-based approach. This is one instance of the managers' and employees' having different views. The employees described a certain unease as they feel they do not know exactly what their rights or possibilities are. In other words, some had clearly pondered the possibility of some changes, but didn't feel comfortable approaching their supervisors as they didn't know whether their request were reasonable or not. There was even a certain level of irritation, as one of the informants put it: "I mean, there's this manager who just leaves whenever he pleases and works from home. Can I do this? I can do it, as far as my work is concerned, but I don't know how the request would be received if I asked. You just don't know." Sometimes there would be positive developments that weren't presented as a part of a specific family policy, but rather people would "hear of" a possibility.

The managers in both places mentioned that employee interviews indicated a growing need for specific measure to make it easier for employees to reconcile their family and occupational responsibilities. Some foresaw an increase in flexible working hours and working from home in the next years, where this is possible. Then, there was a constant increase in the number of men availing themselves of the opportunity for paternity leave and it was made quite clear that the company fully respected that right and did not try to hinder that in any way. If there was any negative reaction to men taking paternity leave, it was most likely from older men. The younger generation considers this not only perfectly acceptable but almost self-evident. The employees mentioned that working from home was frowned upon only a few years ago, but that had changed quite a bit. A few years ago it was even considered inappropriate when children were sick at home but that was not the case today. However, there is a great emphasis on everybody doing their work 100% but today that does not necessarily mean that you have to be in your office.

The evident trend towards increased flexibility cannot be traced to the business's deliberate change of policy. What happened was on the one hand that new owners brought in different emphases and on the other, it was simply necessary to change mainly due to the fact that nowadays there is no guarantee that the mother is at home or is in a better position to work from home than the father.

People were no less happy and ambitious with the institution than they were with the business. The informants stated their pleasure in working for the institution, took pride in its work and were ambitious on its behalf. Gunnar stated: "As are others in here, I am very happy in my job. I am ambitious on its behalf and sometimes I feel, as do others working there, that I am the only one who does. I sometimes say I have the best job in the world."

The institution is also very popular in Iceland, it is in the public discourse and surveys suggest that the public believes it turns out a good product. This positivity is of course encouraging for the employees and creates a certain team spirit. Everybody seemed to agree about its existence, even though there was some animosity between divisions.

One of the managers put it so that it seemed that irrespective of what people were doing, they always had in mind the thought that they should put out a product that the institution could be happy about and was a positive contribution towards society. On the other hand, many complained that the institution received inadequate funding and lately political influence had been such that people were uncertain about the institution's future. Both had a negative impact on the morale.

Most of the factors specifically mentioned in the questionnaire about the opportunities for reconciliation of family and work life exist both within the company and the institution. Employees have a right to a paid leave if other members of the family are ill, some have the possibility of working from home, some have the possibility of working flexible hours and the opportunity of working a tight week or taking an unpaid leave are also there. The business does not offer part-time work, but if somebody were to ask to work part-time for a limited time, the request would receive positive consideration. In neither workplace are there any specific possibilities regarding children (kindergarten, nannies etc.), but managers emphasize that men's right to paternity leave is fully respected and that is regarded as the major change in gender relations in the last years.

It also became clear through conversations with the employees that whereas they weren't aware of a specific family policy, they were fairly certain that if something came up that resulted in them having to prioritize the family more, that would be taken into consideration in a positive way and every effort would be made to meet those needs.

One of the managers put this quite well when I asked whether something specific was done to make it easier for employees to reconcile family and work life.

*A: I don't know if we can say it's something deliberate. The young fathers, of course, take their paternity leave as the law says they can and it may have been a big change for them, maybe in particular within the technical sector, because this was something they had hardly ever had to face before, and now they're doing it in droves. This guy's gone and this guy and something like that. But it's all been alright. But we are a public institution and we have these clauses, like about the right to take leave when children are sick... but of course we go beyond that when things are particularly hard. And like now, we have a recent example... This couple here has a girl that was seriously ill and had to go abroad for treatment and they both got the time off. They were way past that stated number of days they have according to the contracts, but it was just decided that they could have this in addition, as it was necessary, you know, that they didn't have to take it from their vacation. Maybe we're trying to look at the individual cases and trying to meet... An employee here has a child that is not 100% well, and has to go see physical therapists and occupational therapists and that's largely done, I think, during work hours... and it has... it's been working out.*

*Q: So you would say that you are generally positive here within the institution ...?*

*A: Yes, we try to be, but maybe it's like... it varies how easy it is to meet these requests. Some people have jobs that require somebody to fill in for them if they're not here. It's different when it's somebody doing a job that other people do as well.*

*Q: But this isn't written down anywhere, anything like that?*

*A: No, no it isn't..*

Later in the interview it emerged that people may have a harder time prioritizing their family when there are fewer people in their department and they know that their absence will seriously increase the pressure on those remaining at work. I asked whether she knew that men had postponed or cancelled their paternity leave because of pressure, but she felt that was impossible. *"No, no, I don't think so. No, they show up here, pretty happy, with the papers from the State Social Security Institute and they're going to go on this particular day and... No, I think they figure somebody else will have to take care of it, I'm going."*

The descriptions from both managers in the business indicated a high pressure environment and busy days. Aside from a lot of paid work, there are the traditional chores in the home, helping children with homework and shuttling them around for sports or other hobbies. *"My time is booked from seven until about eleven every day,"* one of them said. Despite that, there is an interest in doing even more and they attend courses or school on the side, primarily to improve their skills for the job they are in or to be more competitive for other jobs if they should lose this one. Employee surveys within the institute also indicate that the employees there feel pressured.

Nobody has more than 24 hours in the day and it is clear that the pressure primarily hits the time that can be counted as real time of and not least any social interactions. *"You don't see friends and family as often as you'd like,"* one manager said. Most informants also agreed that work was too big a chunk of their existence, it would be desirable to increase the time they had with their families. But nonetheless, the point was emphasized a



number of times that this was not an involuntary position, that this was an individual's choice and primarily their own responsibility.

I asked one informant whether he felt this increased pressure was starting to hurt his family or affecting that sphere of his life:

*To some extent it does, but in my case, I have decided to try and guard it by just finishing my day. I haven't opened myself up to the option of working here, maybe weekends on end, although there has, strictly speaking, been a need for that. I also think that's sort of giving in to the pressure that comes from those in charge of a business in this environment. It's possible that I get penalized for that in some way, but I just feel this is something that people need to safeguard. They need to safeguard their own lives, their own health and their own families. There's a lot of pressure from many different directions and this is one of them.*

Overall, there was a lot of emphasis on the fact, especially within the business, that people had to shoulder the responsibility for their own lives, including making sure that work didn't dominate their existence entirely and destroyed their home life. I asked if people saw the business do anything to make that balancing act easier:

*I don't really see that there's much reason for the business to do anything about it. But I haven't really thought about it. I have heard that some people have quit here, I think maybe because of some trouble with the kids. [Bjarni]*

*I don't know what the business should be doing. People just need to prioritize and safeguard this and if they do it themselves the businesses can't get any further with it. It's in everybody's nature to go as far as they can and it's in the nature of managers to try to squeeze everything out of their staff they possibly can. It's up to the employees, and perhaps the unions, to make sure those things don't go out of bounds. [Ari]*

It also became clear that the couples often negotiate home and family responsibilities and things are solved so that the one of the pair that has better chances of working nights and weekends will pick up the kids in the afternoon, do the shopping, cooking and such, and then work after the kids are in bed. One of the informants (a woman) gave a very clear and detailed description about this negotiation pattern and its causes:

*A: I live with such a good man that this division of labour is not a problem for us and I feel that's the norm today. I guess he's just more active than I am. We decided when the boys were little, that this was just the way it had to be. There was nothing but haggling and annoyance so we made a decision to divide the labour in a certain way, and that's stuck.*

*Q: So you just set down and negotiated, he does this, you do that, and...*

*A: Yes, yes.*

*Q: And what does he do, and what do you do?*

*A: His work is such that it suits him to go home at five, because after that he can't really get hold of people, but then he can get them at night, so he often, when I'm busy, he can pick up the kids and take them home, and then he's on the phone in the evening and then I take over. So we've managed to puzzle this together and before I started working here I was told this was a lot of work and asked how I would manage with*

*the kids, so we sat down and discussed that this was something we wanted me to do and then he'd have to cover more of the responsibilities at home when needed.*

*Q: So, you were asked about this during your job interview?*

*A: Yes, I was asked that.*

*Q: Do you think he was asked the same question, or would be asked it if he were on a job interview?*

*A: No, but I also think it depends a lot on the work culture and his work place is not stuck in these old patterns, my business was a lot more that way and the guy who interviewed me was new on the job so I think it was more his lack of experience that caused him to ask that question. I think he was really scared whether I actually could handle the job.*

*Q: So you think that the young men who are coming in after that are less likely to ask that question?*

*A: Yes, I think so. I think it's a development for people, and the more experienced you are as a manager then this would disappear, because you may have experienced it yourself, to have a bunch of little kids and it's just something you haven't been through yet. I think so. But then there are always some chauvinists. But, I actually think that their numbers are decreasing, I can't believe anything else. At least I don't see as much of them.*

*Q: Yes. But as for the division of labour in the home, I mean, does he cook more and...?*

*A: He cooks, I clean up after dinner and we divide helping the kids with home work, we just sort of take one each and do it at the same time. He does the laundry, I clean and tidy up, we take care of the garden together and... shopping, we usually do that while the kids have sport practices on the weekends, one of us goes to practice while the other one goes shopping. If we can't do the shopping during the weekend, then we try to do it at lunch during the week, one of us. So, we divide the work pretty evenly.*

*Q: And it's a fairly unusual division of labour, in that it's rare that the man does the laundry.*

*A: Well, when we sat down to discuss it, I just said: "OK, what do you want to do?" because I felt I was doing everything and he was doing nothing, that classic pattern, you know, so we tried this out. He said: "Fine, I'll just do the laundry," and I said: "OK," and I took the cleaning. Then we traded once. He had gotten bored with it, and I was bored with cleaning all the time, cleaning the toilet all the time with three men in the house. So we traded off, but I felt that he did a poor job of cleaning. I felt I had to clean the toilet twice per week and I just have a higher threshold than he does and I'm always mopping and dusting every 2-3 days, and he just did it at random, so we decided to switch back. We found that the other thing just caused us to argue more.*

*Q: You say that before you negotiated you did all of the work. How did that happen, did you bring it into the relationship that this is your responsibility, or did he...?*

*A: No, I think, I just took it, it was just me somehow... I don't come from that kind of a home. I may just take responsibility, more responsibility and I felt it was somehow*

*just: "NOW we need to clean" and it was usually I who said: "We're cleaning today." It didn't really bother him, so naturally it was like: "Oh, why do I always have to decide," you know, the typical barter between a man and woman. But as far as he was concerned, it so happens that when he was younger he had to take care of the home a bit. So he was well trained before we met.*

*Q: Yes, but you also mentioned that when you look around you, this seems to be more of a norm today.*

*A: Yes, I think it is.*

*Q: Is it because the women are all working full time as well and just can't manage with the home too?*

*A: Yes, and I just feel that... You know, I think a woman today will not accept having to do all of the work by herself. There are a lot of people I know who have an au pair, who will do the laundry and clean, and then the rest of the chores are shared, but like I said... One of my friends has a husband who does nothing, but for everybody else, things are pretty well balanced. And then an au pair to take care of what's left.*

*Q: So you are pretty content with the way things are?*

*A: Yes, and I never could have done this without him. I often say that if I'd married someone else, or had these kids with somebody else, I wouldn't be what I am today.*

The reason for including this long chapter here, practically verbatim, is that it reflects so many of the things we are looking at in this study. Sex discrimination in the workplace appears quite clearly. The woman has been asked how she will manage to care for her children, but she is undoubtedly right in her estimate that a man is far less likely to be asked such a question.

It is also likely that the changes she mentions are real. More and more men have experienced taking care of a home and children to a great extent and having a demanding job as well. It is clearer to them than previous generations of men that this is possible. The possibilities for collectivized day care are of course much greater today than they were in the past and this may be more evident to younger men than their older counterparts. Lastly, there is no doubt that younger men have gone through the educational system, including university, with women, and are aware of their skills and capabilities. They realize, at least to some extent, that they are losing out on qualified employees if they were to exclude young mothers or young women as a whole.

Finally, it is likely that the description given of the division of the household chores, and the development of that issue, is an experience increasingly shared by many couples. Of course men and women come into cohabitation with the experience that the women have been more active in the household than the men have in the past, and they seem to continue to be more active. But the reality of our times calls for a different division of labour, now that the woman also works full-time outside of the home. This entails two things. On the one hand, more services will be bought in the open market. This means cleaning services, more ready-made meals and assistance in other parts of life. For some this will involve bringing an au pair into the home. On the other hand, this also means that women demand more participation from men, and that participation is probably on the rise. It is also likely that the men's participation is under the management of women, and that it is still so that the main responsibility for cleaning and doing laundry is on their

shoulders, even though the man is an active participant. That the participation becomes so that “he is just more active” is probably not a very common thing. Actually, one can imagine that this is in some way related to class or educational status, and that the description above will apply more to couples who are both in management positions, or the woman at least has a job that is demanding in more ways than just time.

The men’s descriptions bring out a more traditional pattern in many ways. Both in that the division is mostly that the woman does the “inside” jobs, but the man tends to the car, garden, and maintenance of the house, but also so that they feel that the woman does more and specifically that she was in charge and decided what needed to be done. “I won’t say no if I’m asked,” one informant said when asked about indoor chores, but he did not initiate work on these chores.

*I must admit that more of these things fall on her, you know, somehow she just takes more of the responsibility, I just do as I’m told. She’s always been a little of a... she feels she is more responsible and makes more demands... but I, so she’s always taken the lead on these things, you know.*

In general, the men felt that the division of the labour was fairly even, but as previously mentioned, in most instances the woman would have the initiative. It wasn’t always the case, however, and in some homes the distribution was discussed and decided so that one party didn’t have to tell the other one to do things.

Of course it is very likely that family behavior is in some way influenced by the woman’s position on the labour market. Studies conducted in the Nordic countries demonstrate the significance of the woman’s position in the labour market on the chances of the man taking paternity leave (Brandth and Kvande 2003; Christoffersen 1990 and 1998). A similar picture emerges in Iceland when it comes to men using the shareable months in parental leave, according to one qualitative study (Ingólfur V. Gíslason 1995). This is of course partly because the labour market is structured so that it is difficult for managers to leave their positions for an extended period of time.

A long maternity/paternity leave works similarly, so that it doesn’t seem strange to assume that a more even distribution of the leave than we see on average, and a more even distribution of the household chores is in some way related to the woman’s status on the labour market.

All of the women interviewed had left the labour market at some point to care for their children. The oldest one had not intended to return to work after giving birth to her second child (of three), but things turned out differently and it seems to have happened primarily because she enjoyed her work.

Only one of the men had left the labour market after having children and it was primarily because his wife ran her own business and couldn’t afford to be away from it. Actually, the deciding factor in how they divided the leave was that his supervisor at the time had some very hard and unusual views about childbirth and family responsibilities:

*A: I was going to take three months [paternity leave] but my employer didn’t approve of me taking paternity leave, I just got a severance package and took six months.*

*Q: Yes! Nice! They must have been some...*

*A: It didn't matter whether you were male or female. Actually, two women took... one before me... and nothing was said to her but there was another woman in her chair when she returned. There was a big showdown and it ended up so that the woman, who was in her chair when she returned, quit, and the other one just took her place back. The one that took maternity leave after I did was told that she didn't need to return to work... That's what the private market is like, you know. This supervisor was really something else. There's probably no opposition here. I also know, because I know the banking sector, that when the men take three months' leave nobody is hired to fill in for them, everything was just put on hold, but when the women go on leave somebody is hired to fill in for them, a temp, you know. Of course, if there's nobody doing your work, you're there half the time. But this guy actually said it straight to my face, and to these women, that we were stabbing the business in the back by having children and needing the time off from work.*

Later in the interview we returned to this point and I asked if he had never considered skipping the leave rather than quitting the job:

*A: No, no. I couldn't force my wife to stay home for six more months. She works out of the house a bit, and partly from her office, tries to split it up like that, she does a lot of work at home on the computer and then she spends time in the shop every now and then. But he (their son) had gotten to the age where he just took too much effort. I couldn't take the leave until he was a year old. It took me a whole year to make it to paternity leave.*

This informant was actually the only one who had taken steps to cut back on his paid work, but this was partly due to the fact that the marriage was falling apart. His story clearly indicates that he is active in all of the caring work in the home. But he also clearly states that it wasn't always that way:

*A: Well, when I was working from 1991 to 2004... I worked like a madman, all the time. I never took vacation, hardly ever a weekend off and worked most nights.*

*Q: For thirteen years?*

*A: Yes... but it's rather difficult to re-enter the home, the power balance has been skewed, naturally my wife feels she should be in charge because I have barely been there except for the last two years. It's changed a bit, the equality in the home has actually changed a lot. We had a pretty balanced situation when we lived in Denmark and first after we returned to Iceland, the balance and just the understanding about how to do things and such. But now, there's a lot of struggle... for power. Maybe it's just normal, I've been away for fourteen years, then I come back and intend to meddle in things I've never bothered with before. It's a bit of a problem.*

*Q: Yes and how do you deal with it, how do you try to solve it?*

*A: We just discuss it, quietly. We've also had counseling specifically to address this. A lot had been going on, a lot of kids and a lot of work. She was a workaholic for many years as well, working from dawn till dusk while she was getting her business off the ground. We had an au pair for three or four years. Otherwise, it wouldn't have been possible. Then she'd work out of the house a lot, she'd just worked nights if she needed to.*

*Q: But this power struggle, or whatnot, is it mostly in regards to the children, or the laundry, or...?*

*A: It's mostly about the kids, everything else comes after. She just wants to organize everything. But I'm hoping it's getting better, that we've peaked on this. It had gotten really bad, nothing but stubbornness and stupidity. She's not happy about relinquishing the power, it's an annoying struggle.*

Here again we see how work and family life interact to drive change, and also the various shapes the opposition can take. After slaving away for many years he makes a deliberate decision to slow down, and is for example not seeking a supervisor's position in his current workplace. But the "return" to the home did not go smoothly, because the woman is not happy about losing her power and the responsibility she has carried almost on her own for all of these years. The informant is well aware that this is normal, but it also serves to make his re-entry more difficult if he is not free to do things the way he sees fit.

Actually, none of my respondents felt they wanted to be a stay-at-home dad, and the older ones in particular were not certain they would do well being home alone with a small child for some months: *"Up front, I'd really like to be at home full-time for three months, but it's quite possible that I'd have to go to the psych ward afterwards."* [Bjarni]

Another informant voiced the ambivalence which probably characterizes many couples when it comes to working life and family life. On the one hand there is the wish for material affluence (which calls for much work) on the other there is the wish to spend time together (less work):

*My wife seeks a certain balance between work and family life but she is also very ambitious on my behalf, but then she also expects me to spend more time with the family. So sometimes its "yes, yes if it's going well then just work longer" but then sometimes it becomes "you never do anything but work". So, you know, the situation becomes a bit "schizo" because there is a certain vanity, carrier, more money, higher status and then there is also that everybody wants the family to play together and fool around in the mountains. Generally speaking the family expects me to be a good provider and then to find time to be with them.*

Neither the company nor the public institution have any specific measures to promote caring masculinity and the managers really did not see that as specific issue. In a similar way very few concrete measures to encourage caring masculinity were suggested, neither from managers nor the regular employees. On the whole the informants appeared to be pleased with how their needs were met by the managers. If they needed to adjust something in their working environment due to temporary family responsibility, the requests were generally well received. What they felt uncomfortable about was not being aware of what was a reasonable request.

For these reasons, there seemed to be a general desire to have a family policy for the business written down, what it would be willing to do, even if it was put in general terms. It would be good to have some guidelines on hand. Nonetheless, people were very happy that there was a willingness to find individual solutions, something that fits in the here and now, rather than clear rules that might not be so flexible.

Only two things were mentioned that might be identified as specific suggestions for action. On the one hand, informants in both places mentioned that it would be good to have a children's room or corner at the work place, where kids could spend time if they had to be

brought in to work for some reason, as might happen when there were planning days in school or playschool. It was even mentioned that where a number of large businesses or institutions are in the same building or within a short distance, they might have a common facility of this kind. It should be noted, however, that in neither workplace were there any complaints if children had to come with their parents to work occasionally. Every now and then, it could be problematic, for example when a lot of children come into the workplace at the same time, as happened during the strike in the elementary schools a few years ago but on the whole the children were welcome.

On the other hand, there were some clear wishes about making children's lives easier by making their after-school activities more closely linked with the schools, so that the parents don't always have to shuttle them back and forth and spend a lot of effort on that. That wish, of course, is not directed towards businesses and institutions, but towards the public sphere, both state and local.

Some people also mentioned improved opportunities for working at home when they needed to, even if it was only to get rid of the constant driving back and forth between home and work.

Finally, they mentioned that the best thing to do might be to increase the number of employees, to limit the pressure on the staff, something that seems highly unlikely to happen in today's rationalizing hysteria.

In a nutshell, the status is that the reconciliation of family and occupational responsibilities is not on the agenda of businesses and institutions. Why should it be? It is even further from the minds of managers that "fostering caring masculinities" is something they should promote or include as a part of their personnel policy. People don't understand the concept.

One informant stated that the fact that employees had a family was not part of the equation when something was done or changed within companies in general. It didn't really matter whether it was the décor of the building or the scheduling of shifts. This factor simply was never taken into consideration.

*The person is never put in first, second, or third place. The focus is more on getting it on and getting it done. But if something comes up, something goes wrong, they are positive. If there is an illness, an illness in the family, everybody is willing to assist. But while things are going smoothly, they don't really think about it much... I think we're just missing some maturity here. They are not being evil or anything, it's just that the thought doesn't merit first, second, or third place.*

Also, you can barely say that for men, or employees in general, the issue is high on the agenda, at least not as far as demands to management or employers go. It's probably an adequate description of the problems here that the women I interviewed had much clearer opinions on the issue than the men, and they were also more certain that this was an issue that would need to be addressed more by society.

## **5.2 Strategic plan within the companies on gender issues**

The business and institution were both chosen to participate partly because the Centre for Gender Equality had information that both had a gender equality programme in place. A study of these programmes, however, demonstrates that neither can qualify as an action

plan, but serve more as a general statement of interest. Neither the company nor the public institution has measured the status of gender equality in key areas, set clear goals and with specific dates to achieve them by, nor identified benchmarks to assess how they are doing.

On the whole, these gender equality programmes do little other than repeat what the law states about the equal rights and equal status of women and men. It also emerged in conversations with the employees that they were not familiar with these programmes, thought that they might be in place but had never seen them, let alone heard of any work to present them to the employees.

Typical sentences from these programmes are: *“The appropriate clauses of the Gender Equality Act will be observed when hiring staff.”* *“[The institution] adheres to the law when it comes to advertising open positions.”* *“[The company] emphasizes that employees will not be discriminated against because of their sex, nationality, or age.”*

When it comes specifically to the part involving reconciliation of family and work life, both programmes address this, but leave the issue rather open: “Employees shall be given the possibility to tend to temporary family responsibilities such as may be caused by the illness of a child, spouse, or other close relatives.” It is interesting that here only illness is mentioned, but it does cover more than the immediate family of spouse and children. This is actually the only thing that is said about family responsibility in the business’s personnel policy.

The institution also has one item that appears to address family responsibility specifically: *“Employees [of the institution] shall have the opportunity to work flexible hours or to adjust their working hours, whenever possible.”* It is not clearly stated that this is because of family responsibilities, nor is anything said about how this could be done.

Neither the company nor the institution have made their personnel policy or gender equality programme available on line.



## 6. Recommendations

A recent Gallup poll showed that among working parents of children between the ages of 0 - 10 the two most sought after changes in worklife in order to increase the balance between that and family life were flexible working hours and shorter working hours. Some gender difference emerged as 47% of the fathers named flexible working hours and 31% of the mothers. When it came to shorter working hours 37% of the mothers opted for that and 28% of the fathers (Þjóðarpúls Gallup).

It is pretty obvious from the interviews in this project that employees experience increased pressure in their work life. The development has been that fewer and fewer people are expected to do more and more. This naturally has a spill-over effect on family life which becomes more stressed and hectic. All this leads to sickness and an increase in the number of people being declared invalid and unable to work.

The greatest single change that could help parents to balance working life and family life would probably be a general reduction in working hours. This is a legislative matter since it is necessary that all firms compete on a similar ground in this regard. This is in fact a similar matter to what happened regarding parental leave in Iceland. It had become fairly obvious in the nineties that existing laws on the parental leave were not meeting the requirements of parents. Some firms had began helping parents in this regard but preferred it not to be known. This helped the individuals in question but did little or nothing to change the general social setting. The laws adopted in 2000 did however achieve just that.

More flexibility is another matter. That is something that individual firms can organize but it can be a two edged sword. It is possible that it will lead to an increase in the general greediness of working life, so that there will not be a real difference between working life and family life, no real time off, either work or being constantly stand by. That does not have to happen though and obviously a development towards more flexibility is on its way. But there is also the fact that not everybody can make use of flexible working hours or working from home or using similar opportunities. Nurses have to be where the patients are when they are needed there and teachers have to be with the children during school hours.

Based on the general development of Icelandic society and the information gathered in the interviews in this study I would suggest the following measures for firms and institutions that want to foster caring masculinities or, more broadly, want to help their employees to achieve a better balance between working life and family life:

1. A gender equality plan has to be in place and it has to be taken seriously. It is not enough to reprint clauses from the laws on gender equality and state a general goodwill in the matter. The situation has to be measured, goals set and time limit to achieve them decided upon. This should be done and carried through by a group of employees and managers and done openly so that everyone is aware of the plan, goals and time limits.
2. Since it is well known that women have shouldered the task of intimate caring and household work to a far greater degree than men such a gender equality plan should carry goals of increasing the participation of men in family care. It should also be part and parcel of the plan to discourage men from working long hours and that meetings and seminars should be held within the limits of a normal working day and week, not in the evening or during weekends.

3. Even though it is good and necessary that individual considerations will be taken it is necessary that the employees are aware of the general possibilities and are also aware that requests will be considered in a positive way not as an attempt to escape from work, not doing your share. Anything else invites favoritism and will probably in the long run increase dissatisfaction within the firm or institution.
4. Little things mean a lot. The employees interviewed mention that in general it was ok to bring your child to work if needed. However nothing was done to help the children pass the time there. It was pointed out that particularly in the institution space was not the problem. All that was really needed was to give the matter a thought and then a solution would be easy to find. A small children's corner and much would have been achieved. This was not so much a question of money, more just a general recognition of the family responsibilities of the employees and a willingness to think the matter through.
5. Finally an encouragement of active fathering on behalf of the workplace could be done by for example having an outing or a sportsevangemang specially for fathers (and grandfathers) and their offspring. This would serve to make it more visible that the men among the employees are also fathers.

I want to stress here that these are in no way revolutionary measures. They simply serve to help and encourage individual fathers who want to be more active in the caretaking and participate more in family life. In order to make a real impact on the gendered division of labour more radical measures are needed, measures that will have to come through general laws. A development towards that is obviously happening in many European countries, mainly driven by on the one hand the labour market participation of women and on the other by the demographical crisis in Europe.

## 7. Conclusions

In the last few decades, significant changes have occurred in the position of women and men in Icelandic society, as well as in other Western societies. These changes have mainly entailed that the lives of women have become more similar to the lives of men. There is very little difference between the labour participation rate of women and men, and while men still work longer hours than women, the difference has been getting smaller in the last few years, both as regards part-time and total working hours. At the same time, women have increased their level of education and there have, for a few years now, been more women than men among the graduates from the University of Iceland. This has brought with it a slow narrowing of the gender pay gap.

At the same time, the position of children has changed significantly. In short, it can be said that child rearing has been collectivized. This involves more and more children from each cohort going to day care, they are younger and younger when they start and they spend more and more time there every day. This is obviously closely linked to the increased participation of women (mothers) in paid labour. A more recent aspect to this is the attempt to increase men's participation in family life, and specifically in the caring for young children. This appears most clearly in the changes made to the law on maternity/paternity leave in 2000. On the whole, the change seems to have had a positive effect, at least so far as to involve more Icelandic fathers than ever before in the caring and raising of their young children.

It is indicative of the changes that have been taking place in Icelandic society that attitudes towards the ideal family gave changes drastically in the last decade. In 1995 Gallup asked a representative part of the population a series of questions regarding gender equality and family life (Gallup 1995). One of the questions was: Which of the following family type's do you think is more beneficial to society: A family where both parents work for a salary and share responsibility for the home and family or a family where one works for a salary and the other takes the responsibility for the home and the family. 57% said the latter was better for society. This question was asked again in 2006 and now only 24,1% opted for that family type (Þjóðarpúls Gallup 1996). So the dual earner – family responsibility sharing family has in 11 years moved from being the preferred type of a minority of Icelanders to being preferred by 2/3 of the population.

The interviews this study is based on clearly demonstrate that the idea of the father being the mother's equal as a care provider is far from a reality in the minds of Icelanders. Statistics about the custody of children after divorce indicates that parents are increasingly cooperating in the upbringing of their children. Research points in the same direction (Sigrún Júlíusdóttir & Nanna K. Sigurðardóttir 2000). But on the other hand, the numbers of single fathers have not grown in Iceland, clearly showing that it is still the mother who is the child's main care provider. Furthermore, labour market research indicates that employers feel women have a greater obligation towards their families than men do, which of course results in employers not finding women as secure and stable employees as men.

This is also clearly indicated in the part of the interviews which addresses the household chores. The men think that they are tending to them to a similar extent as their spouses are, but more often than not the responsibility, oversight and management seems to rest with the woman. The man does what she tells him to do. The interviews with managers, however, indicate that the circumstances may differ depending on the woman's position on the labour market. If she holds a fairly high level position in her workplace, new dimensions open up in the couple's negotiations about the household chores. The same has been evident in research on the uptake of maternity/paternity leave, both in Iceland and

the other Nordic countries. The woman's position in the labour market is the main deciding factor in the length of the man's paternity leave, and the way he makes use of it.

When it comes to corporations and institutions, it seems clear that the idea of the man as an active care provider in family life is barely there. Actually, the fact is that when gender equality "programmes" are reviewed, there aren't many clauses addressing family responsibility, neither for men nor women. However, everybody agreed that when something came up, there was willingness to address the problem and people got the chance to change their working hours or schedule in some way in order to achieve a balance and prioritize the family for some time. In that way, a general family policy is in place, although little or nothing about it is written down, and it is valid for both men and women. But there is nothing to promote caring masculinities, and actually the interviews indicated that most businesses still expected the mother to be the infant's primary caretaker, and that the man's use of paternity leave would to some extent be dictated by the business's needs. The statistics on uptake of paternity leave seem to point in the same direction.

This leads to the main conclusion that changes towards a more equal status of men and woman is today mostly driven by the cohabitation of couples. The changing position of women in the labour market clearly calls for a change in the division of labour within the home and in the caring for children. This does by no means apply to all women or all couples. It is still clearly so that women in general adapt their status in the labour market more to the needs of the family than men do, i.e. they shoulder the responsibility for caring. But it appears that among women working full-time, women working in jobs they have specifically trained for and women running their own business or in management positions, certain possibilities for change will open up. When the woman is in such a position, it becomes less self-evident that the caring and family responsibility is primarily on her shoulders. In these instances, negotiations will take place and the couple will seek a solution that entails as even and fair a division of the time they have.

It is not apparent that the traditional views of men and women are a large factor in these negotiations, nor that the labour market is unable to address the issue. But there is also no initiative from that direction and there may be a good reason to ask why there should be. The interests of businesses and institutions must primarily lie in the use of labour and secondly in the fact that employees are comfortable enough to maximize their productivity. Therefore, businesses and institutions should not find it in their interest to object to these changes, but also that they see little reason to actively promote them, as these negotiations are conducted within each family. Actually, research from other countries suggests that men may be penalized more than women for shouldering an unusually large share of the family responsibility, both as regards wages and opportunities for promotions (Stafford and Sundström 1996). But this is not a direct and active opposition, where men are told to get lost if they behave this way (although this has been known to happen). Rather, it seems that the supervisors feel that the man in question has "let the company down" by behaving like a woman. He will therefore be penalized like women are penalized for their family responsibilities, but the man is penalized more severely, as it is believed that he has a choice in the matter, but that the woman doesn't.

Therefore, it is my conclusion that the main driving force behind the changes which are in motion, is in the changing position of women in the labour market, the willingness of men to meet their wives' needs within the home and family, and the results of the negotiations taking place within the home. These changes will perhaps have an impact on the policy of the corporations in the future, but as of yet there are no indications that such a development has begun.

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Fostering Caring Masculinities (FOCUS) seeks to examine and improve men's opportunities for balancing work and private/family life, and in turn increasing their ability to develop their role as caregivers in the home.

To reach this goal the project will focus on companies' framework conditions to perceive and include men as actors and target groups in equality policies.

This trans national project involves five countries:  
Germany, Iceland, Norway, Slovenia and Spain.

The project is funded through EU's Community Action programme to promote Gender equality between men and women. FOCUS is grounded in one of priority themes of the program, "the role of men in the promotion of gender equality, in particular the role of men and fathers in the reconciliation of work and private life".

FOCUS was initiated by the Norwegian Ministry for Children and Equality, co-funders of the project.

**For more information see [www.caringmasculinities.org](http://www.caringmasculinities.org)**



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