



Federal Ministry for
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,
Women and Youth



Sinus Sociovision

Vocational Reintegration as a Perspective

Aims, motives and experiences
of women before, during and after
returning to working life

Experiences

Women

Vocational
Reintegration

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of women before, during and after
returning to working life

**Quantitative representative survey
by Sinus Sociovision
on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs,
Senior Citizens, Women and Youth**

Foreword

Responsibility for the family and work is still unequally divided between women and men. Compared to our northern and western neighbours, we in Germany additionally have the special situation that a relatively large number of women quit their job when the first child is born. Lengthy periods for the family are perfectly all right. But 80% of women would like to return to working life – when the children are a bit older at the latest. It is unacceptable that, following a time out of this kind, young mothers are unable to reconnect with working life because neither the available offers of childcare nor working conditions are geared to young children.



Today, many younger women have already come to realise that periods of employment between children not only secure the family income, but also offer prospects for career advancement and, in the long term, help prevent poverty in old age. These women benefit from the parental pay, which enables both parents to jointly shape their family and working life. The fact that, in individual Federal Länder, one man in five already takes parental leave today is a promising signal for fairer sharing of family duties and career opportunities between the sexes. In addition, young couples can today already rely on there being an adequate supply of high-quality childcare, even for infants, by the year 2013. And more and more companies are nowadays investing in a family-friendly working world that gives consideration to careers with children.

As pleasing as these new trends may be, we also need to specifically make offers for women who would like to return to the labour market after taking six, seven or more years off for their family. They must not finish up in an occupational dead-end. The present study shows that a host of factors decide on their success and failure on their way back into the working world. The majority of society nowadays has a positive attitude towards this desire to return to work after a family-raising period. What is often missing is business enterprises that recognise the great potential of women returning to work and exploit this potential for their own benefit. Anyone setting out after a lengthy break first of all needs starting points and contacts. But they have often been lost, especially after many years of time out. Consequently, the project of returning to working life turns out to be a major challenge, particularly for women over the age of 40. With its orientation aids and concrete offers of support, my Ministry's "action programme for the vocational reintegration of women after a prolonged family-related leave of absence" is particularly intended to make it considerably easier for this group to make a successful new start.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ursula v. der Leyen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

URSULA VON DER LEYEN

FEDERAL MINISTER FOR FAMILY AFFAIRS, SENIOR CITIZENS,
WOMEN AND YOUTH

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I.

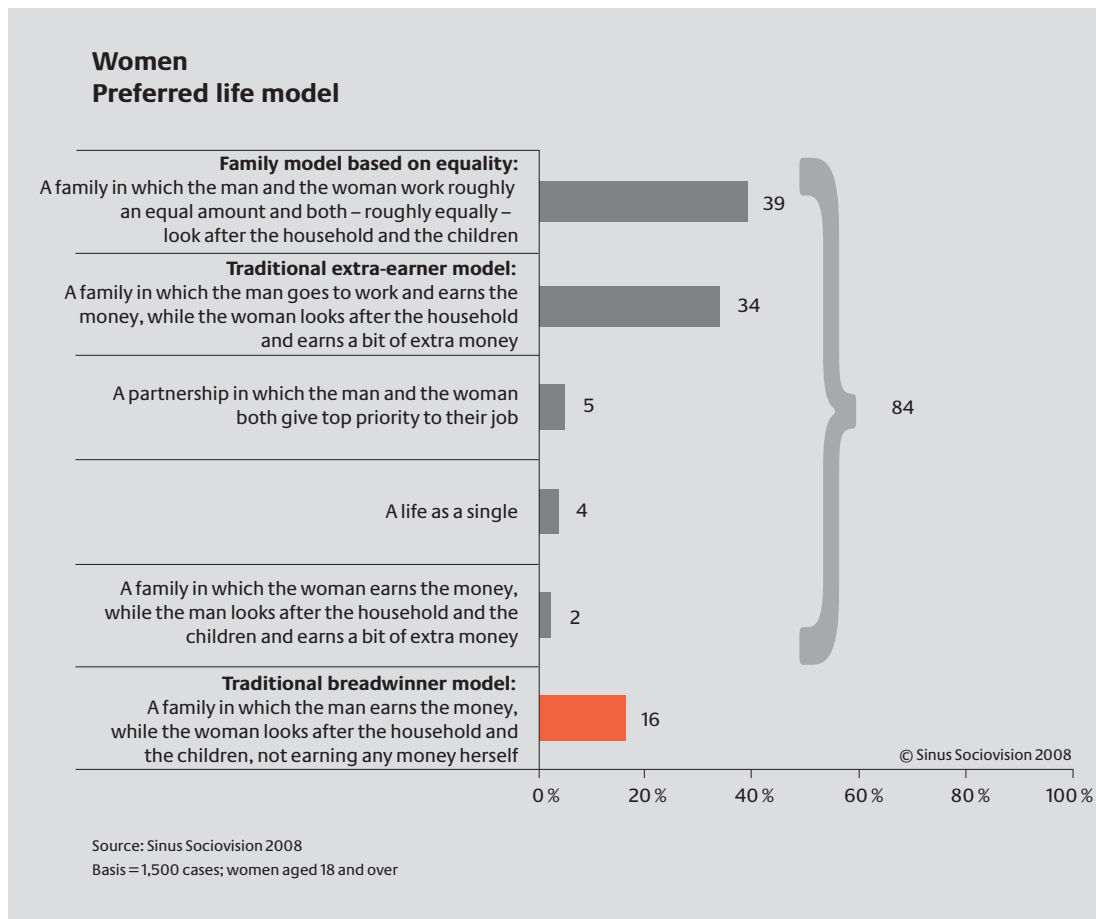
Introduction

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For women today, gainful employment is an integral part of their identity, their role images and their life plans. **84% of women want** to go to work, also and particularly following a family-related career break. A family based on the traditional breadwinner model is today the preferred life model for just 16% of women.



At the same time, there is a regular “slump” in the gainful employment of women in Germany when they become mothers. The family-related career break is – still – primarily a *women’s life phase*: for women who want to start a family, it is a realistic option in their life planning that they will interrupt their career in this context. While older women tend to regard this career break as the rule – including the termination of their career, i.e. the total abandonment of employment in favour of the family – younger women today take the family-related break

with the aim of resuming employment in the near future. However, they frequently do not have a clear and complete picture of the consequences of a career break, and especially of the difficulties involved in vocational reintegration.¹

The extent to which role images have an effect is illustrated by the finding that men see a career break as being part of the *normal* biography as regards *women*; as regards themselves, however, they consider it to be *abnormal* and an exception. For men, the desire to start a family does not imply the possibility of interrupting their own employment. For most men, a *return to employment* occurs at most in connection with unemployment and therefore has negative connotations.

Clear dissonances are revealed not only in the self-image and the role-image of women and men as regards the subject of “vocational reintegration”.² The view of employers and the media of women returning to the working world is likewise obstructed by prejudices and preconceptions. Two equally one-sided and wrong perspectives are predominant in this respect:

- 1) The general assumption that women today are so self-confident and so well-qualified that they have no difficulty in quickly coping with vocational reintegration following a family-related career break;
- 2) The general assumption that vocational reintegration confronts women with such insurmountable obstacles and tasks that a successful return to working life is ultimately pure good luck.

However, things are more complex in reality. The Sinus studies clearly show that no two women returning to work are alike: today, there is no (longer any) such thing as “the” woman returning to work, and the circumstances for vocational reintegration also differ from one woman to the next. The reasons for this plurality lie in the different (individual) life plans of women, in the differentiated and multi-optional notions regarding a partnership, also in the manner of dealing with the fact that the practised lifestyle does not match the “actual” life plan (desire and reality are miles apart: the man makes (or continues to make) a career, while the woman slithers into the traditional role of mother), in the labour market and in corporate cultures, as well as in the infrastructural framework conditions.

I Recent decades have seen a process of individualisation and **pluralisation of lifestyles and life plans**. Family and responsibility, solidarity and the common good have retained high priority in this context, but notions relating to family are (partly) shaped by new role images. “Life plans” are in no way unchanging for a lifetime today, but are instead revised in the individual life phases, adapted and re-negotiated between the partners – often in major conflict with the normative power of the actual circumstances in life.

¹ It is difficult to determine from the outside whether a career break is an involuntary fate or a free choice. The fact is that there is a noticeable trend towards a traditional distribution of roles following the birth of a child. The partners often do not really intend this distribution in their shared life model, but they live it out – supposedly only temporarily – for practical and financial reasons. For some women, this reversion to the traditional model proves to be a “trap”, from which they have to make a major effort to free themselves. Other women see it as a new and attractive life plan.

² In this study, the terms “vocational reintegration” and “return to working life” are used synonymously, although we are well aware that “vocational reintegration” is more strongly associated with a return to “the same workplace”, whereas a return to working life is more openly associated with any form of return to the labour market following a family-related career break.

- ! In view of national and global competition, business enterprises have to demand flexibility and mobility of their staff. As a result, and especially due to the increasing spread of information and communication technologies, **structures within companies, and also corporate cultures**, have changed massively in recent years. It can also be seen that companies are tending to reorganise their internal structures, redefine duties and reassign jobs at increasingly short intervals. This results in both opportunities and risks for women returning to work. Anyone who has been “out of the job” for a lengthy period of time will face disadvantages in terms of both structures and prospects. On the other hand, the increase in project-based work has advantages for women returning to work and part-time employees, because there are so many employees who do not sit permanently at the same workplace.³
- ! The organisational **requirements for reconciling family and career have changed**. It is not enough simply to *have* a place in a day nursery or core-time supervision at school; rather, these facilities must be individually adapted to the working hours of the various mothers (and fathers) and at the same time be able to react flexibly to changes occurring at short notice. Anyone in employment today is usually expected as a matter of course to be available to the employer at short notice and also mobile. 75% of women returning to work complain that the childcare times at kindergarten and core-time supervision at school are geared to women not being employed or only to a minor extent. Most concepts do not cater to full-time working mothers. The majority of mothers and fathers call for the professionalisation of childcare offers in terms of quality, flexibility and willingness to innovate.

To obtain a better understanding of the decisive factors for successful vocational reintegration under these framework conditions, and also a clearer outline of the action required, the SINUS Institute carried out representative surveys of the population on the subject of “vocational reintegration” on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in 2007 and 2008.

The central questions were:

- ! What framework conditions are relevant for successful vocational reintegration?
- ! What is the influence of the number of children and the length of the career break on reintegration?
- ! What are women’s motives for returning to working life?
- ! What have women experienced when returning to working life?
- ! What differences can be seen within the group of “women returning to working life”?

³ Cf. Schaffnit-Chatterjee, Claire (2008): Women on expedition to 2020. The path to more gender equity in Germany. Deutsche Bank Research, 19 May 2008.

II.

Key findings

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Women who withdraw from the labour market for a time for family-related reasons are far from having left it for ever: the desire to go back to work is there, and occasionally very strong. Almost half of the women who have *currently* interrupted their career for family-related reasons would like to return to working life in the near future.

Women have a wide variety of motives for returning to work. Material reasons, such as ensuring the family's livelihood or achieving financial security in old age, play just as great a role in this context as non-material reasons, such as independence or the importance of a job for a woman's self-esteem. One essential finding is that, **in the long term, most women today no longer find fulfilment in child-raising and the household alone**; rather, many women consider that exercising an occupation alongside these duties is essential for a successful life.

It can be seen as a success of emancipation and equal rights policy that women today demonstrate great self-esteem as regards their vocational qualifications, their skills and their worth on the labour market. More than two-thirds of women are of the opinion that they **can rapidly regain a foothold on the labour market**. This self-confidence is particularly pronounced among highly educated women (72%), although it is also remarkably strong among women with little education (65%).

At the same time, women who could potentially return to working life assume that their chances on the labour market are greatly dependent on the **length of the family-related career break**. Thus, almost two-thirds agree entirely with the statement that every additional year of non-employment massively reduces their chances of finding a job in keeping with their qualifications. These expectations on the part of women are probably an accurate reflection of experience with the personnel decisions of business enterprises in recent years.

On the whole, women today state that there is a *growing divide between the desire to participate in the labour market and the existing framework conditions* for successful reintegration. They have serious doubts as to whether they will encounter appropriate structures (in child-care; flexibility at the workplace) and acceptance among employers and colleagues, or also in their own partner. Above all, women with previous experience of a career break and a return to work often appear to be disillusioned in this respect.

The diverse attitudes and experiences of women in relation to vocational reintegration lead to the following results:

1. Vocational reintegration is **not a single step, but a process** that can take several years, from the woman's first thoughts on the matter to coping successfully with the return to working life, and the success of which is dependent on a number of factors. Women with more than one child, in particular, take a gradual, and not always linear, approach to resuming employment on a major scale.
2. The emotional – and also the entirely practical – support of the whole family, and particularly of the husband or partner, plays a major role in coping with this phase. 80% of women agree entirely with the statement that the support of the whole family is necessary when returning to working life. Not only the woman, but **the whole family is affected by the return to work** and called upon to contribute to the process. Against the will of the partner and without his support, it is almost impossible for these women to return to work. Although most women feel they have the emotional and moral support of their partners in their desire to return to work, more than half of all women who have previously experienced a return to work following a family-related career break complain that, in practice, they had to cope with everything essentially on their own. So, returning to working life confronts women with major challenges – whereas little or nothing changes for many men. However, it is also a result of the change in values and a success of equal rights policy that men today *want* to emotionally support their partners going to work and are also *willing* to take on practical duties. The fact that – especially in the eyes of many women – they are not successful enough in doing so is often due to the men's own occupational situation and the persistence of role images in society and at the workplace. The man who supports his partner's return to work by cutting back his own work is still the exception, not the rule. The development of the partner months in connection with parental allowance is also an indicator in this respect: on the one hand, the number of men on parental leave is increasing rapidly. On the other hand, most fathers take their parental leave “only” for the minimum of two months in order to qualify for parental allowance. Ultimately, however, this tool sets a practical example, brings monetary rewards and promotes a change in awareness.
3. For women, the subject of “**vocational reintegration**” is closely linked to the question of the “**reconcilability of family and career**”. More than two-thirds of women (70%) say that reconciling family and career is a difficult undertaking. The limited availability of child-care facilities – especially for children under the age of three – confronts women with complex organisational demands when returning to working life. And from the point of view of women, creating flexible opportunities for working at home (“Home Office”) is not enough. One of the reasons for women returning to the working world is that they no longer want to stay at home, but would like to deal with colleagues and customers at their workplace, work with others on a task and engage in an exchange in order to achieve something. A major percentage of the women returning to work are thoroughly qualified specialists and even highly qualified employees with management potential. They are willing to switch employers if reconciling family and career at the company is permanently difficult or an emotional and social burden.
4. The **expectations of women and employers** regarding reintegration do not automatically match. The issues involved include the working hours and the question of the right and necessary further qualification, all the way to matters of the “fitting” job profile for the new colleague. Numerous employers have not yet fully recognised the potential offered by women returning to work.

Women returning to working life want the necessary framework conditions for a successful return to work and for reconciling family and career. One central finding of the study is that almost one-third of the women who have returned to work following a family-related career break are **thinking about withdrawing from their vocational reintegration**. This is a sobering figure, especially in view of the strong desire of women to go to work. After all, this withdrawal from reintegration is not due to a lack of motivation and personal commitment, but **essentially the result of a lack of support and the absence of structures**.

So, one of the key messages derived from the extensive study on vocational reintegration is that the population – women *and* men alike – calls upon **family and labour market policy to improve the structural and informational framework conditions for vocational reintegration**. Thus, this is not a “lone wish” of women with children, but encounters great solidarity in the whole population – in all strata and social milieus. For example, more than 90% of the population agree entirely with the statement that it is an important task for politicians to facilitate the vocational reintegration of women. This relates to more than just classical “vocational reintegration programmes” as embodied in the German Social Security Code. The demand is for projects and measures that take a comprehensive view of the world in which the target group(s) live(s) and address not only the women themselves, but also employers, the family and social environments and, not least, husbands and partners.

Complementing this sociocultural finding, the debate on demographic change in recent years has made it clear that it is also essential for macroeconomic reasons to further increase the labour force participation rate of women in order to secure and further develop the financial and economic foundations of our society. The **potential and the innovative capacity of women are important** for the social security systems, for the labour market and for Germany as a place for business.

The finding that mothers have a strong desire to engage in gainful employment can be seen:

- (1) as an opportunity for businesses to do justice to their social responsibility and at *the same time* exploit a competitive advantage;
- (2) as a call on society to ensure a climate of social acceptance of the individual desire to return to working life, and
- (3) as an appeal to politicians to initiate and promote supportive framework conditions. In view of the current debate about the “50+ generation”, too, it is encouraging to see the lasting desire of many women over the age of 40 to return to their occupation after interrupting their careers for several years.

III.

Basic data on the career break and vocational reintegration of women

61% of women between the ages of 18 and 65 have already **interrupted their career for family-related reasons** at least once in their lives.

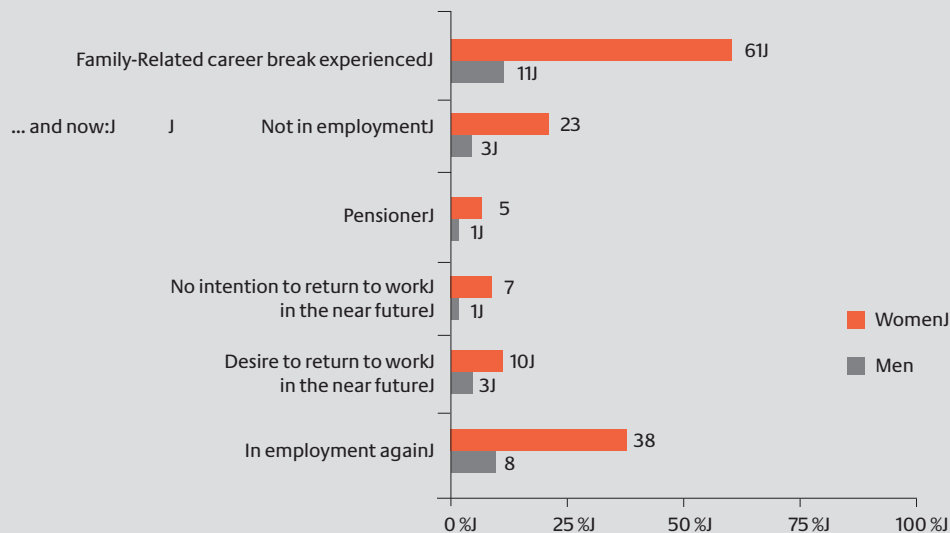
! **38%** of these women are today **in employment** again following the career break.

! **23%** of these women are **not (yet) in employment** again today.

! Almost **one-half (44%)** of women currently taking a career break want to **return to working life in the near future**.

! **Just under one-third** of these women (= 7% of all women) currently expresses **no intention to return to the labour market**. For some of them, the reason for interrupting their career still applies and makes such demands of them that they are currently unwilling or unable to face the idea of returning to work soon. Others have decided in favour of a traditional family model.

Career break and vocational reintegration Situations and intentions of women compared to men



Source: Sinus Sociovision, Jan. 2008
Basis = 2,017 cases; representative survey

Significant relationships can be seen between the age of the women and whether they have interrupted their career for family-related reasons:

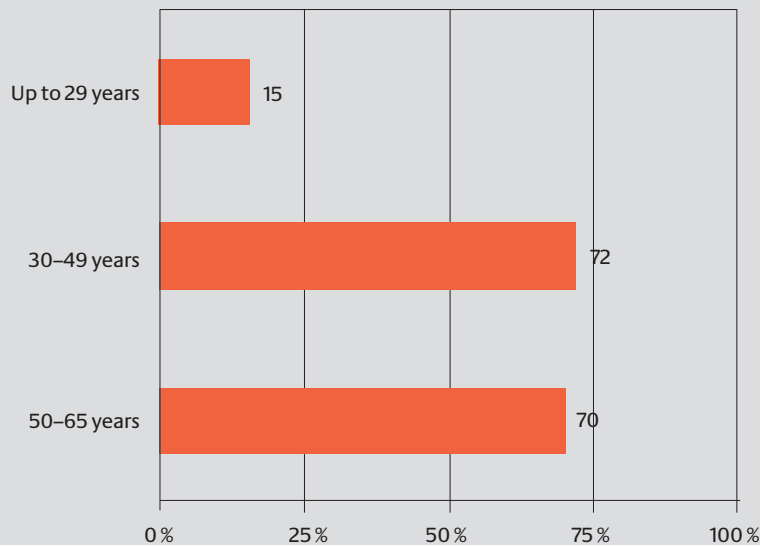
! A family-related career break tends to be fairly infrequent among women between **18 and 29 years of age**: only 15% of women of this age have already been in employment *and* interrupted this employment for family-related reasons.

- | This figure rises significantly to 72% among **30 to 49 year-old** women.
- | And it is 70% in the group aged **50 to 65**. Having interrupted their career some time ago in favour of their own children, the women in this age cohort increasingly face the question of whether they should (continue to) forgo, or reduce the extent of, their employment in favour of their parents (in need of long-term care). This also gives rise to the question as to whether they will subsequently have any chance at all of returning to the labour market. This is where the greatest danger exists of a lengthy *career break* turning into the *end of the career*.

Statistically speaking, a family-related career break occurs for the first time for the majority of women at about **the age of 30**. The reason for this is that more and more couples/women today are deferring starting a family, no longer only in the upper social segments, but also at the middle level of society: apart from exceptions, women first want to complete their education/training and spend a few years in the working world before becoming mothers.

In statistical terms, we can therefore also define the period between the **ages of 30 and 49** as being the important, and also critical, phase for women as regards vocational reintegration.

Career break: Age of the women

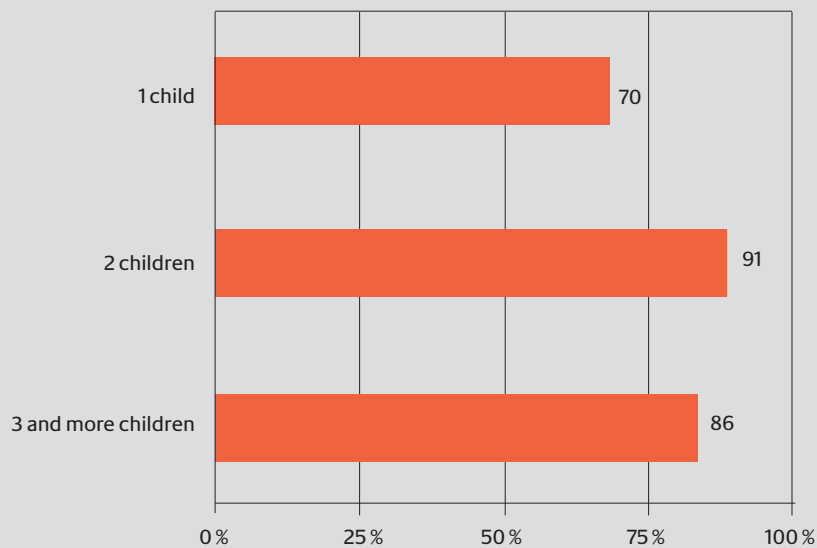


Basis: Women between the ages of 18 and 65 (n = 997 cases)

The influence of the **number of children** on whether, and for how long, women interrupt their careers has often been overlooked in recent years. Only in the context of more recent research by the Family Competence Centre has prominent attention again been paid to the special situation of families with several children: every woman who gives birth to a child interrupts her career – at least for the period of maternity leave and mostly for the duration of parental leave or longer. It is interesting to note that, in the eyes of women, this break to care for children is often not perceived as being a “career break” in the true sense of the word.

- Thus, **70%** of women with **one child** state that they interrupted their career following the birth. On the other hand, 27% of women with one child say they did not interrupt their career.
- **91%** of women with **two children** state that they interrupted their career to raise their children – in their own view, 9% of these women were in uninterrupted employment.
- **14%** of women with **three and more children** state that they remained in the working world without interrupting their career. However, this figure should not be overrated: generally speaking, significantly fewer women in this group are in employment at *all*.

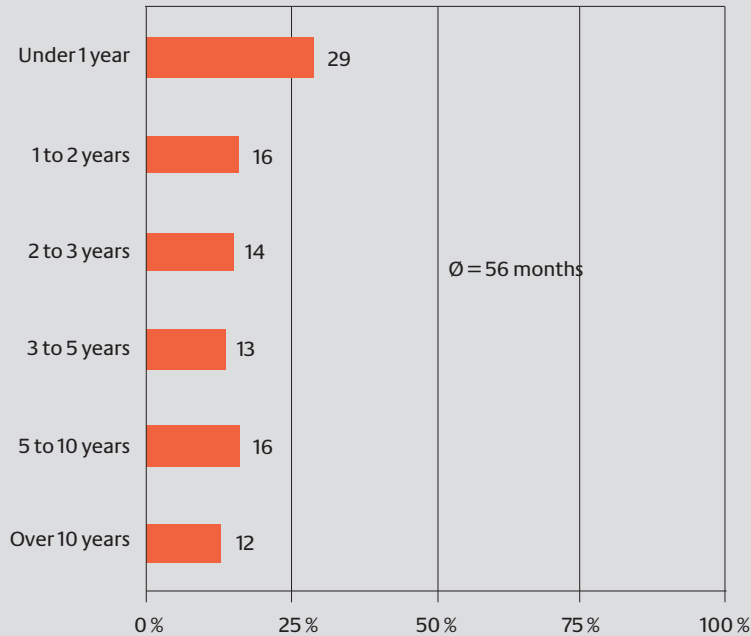
Career break: Number of children



Basis: Women between the ages of 18 and 65 (n = 997 cases)

The average **length of a family-related career break is 56 months for women** (4 years and 8 months).⁴ The breakdown of the length of women's career break is as follows:

Length of women's family-related career break



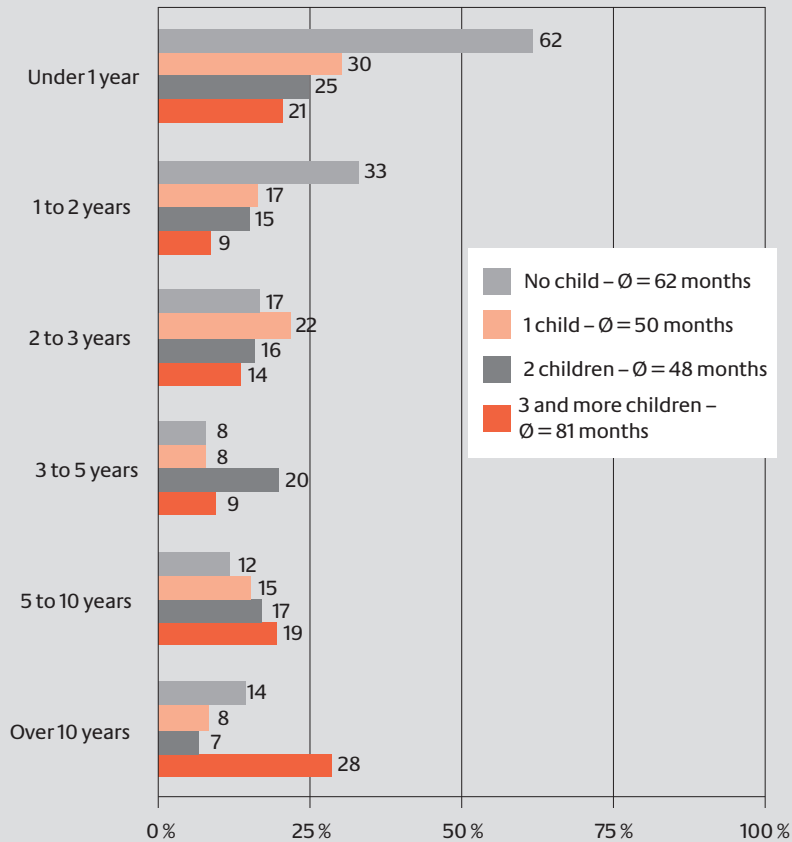
Basis: Women who have previously experienced a family-related career break or are currently in that phase (n = 605 cases)

There is a **relationship between the length of a woman's career break and the number of children she has:**

- I Women with one child** tend to keep their career break fairly short and to return to work after a brief time (62% after less than one year). However, 14% of women with one child have already been out of the working world for more than 10 years, while 12% have interrupted their career for between 5 and 10 years. The main contributory factor in this context is that these women – sometimes consciously – wanted to live a life based on the traditional breadwinner model for a time. Consequently, the average duration of the career break is relatively high at 62 months.
- I The probability of a long-term career break increases with the number of children.** Women with three or more children stay at home for an above-average length of time, many of them even for more than 10 years.

⁴ For comparison: among men, a career break lasts an average of “only” 19 months. However, it must be borne in mind in this context that, in social science surveys, some men re-interpret (“sell”) the loss of their job as a “family-related career break” – often out of embarrassment. The “real” average duration for men is probably even lower.

Length of women's career break – differentiated by number of children –



Basis: Women who have previously experienced a family-related career break or are currently in that phase (n = 605 cases)

Education also has a major influence on the length of a woman's career break:

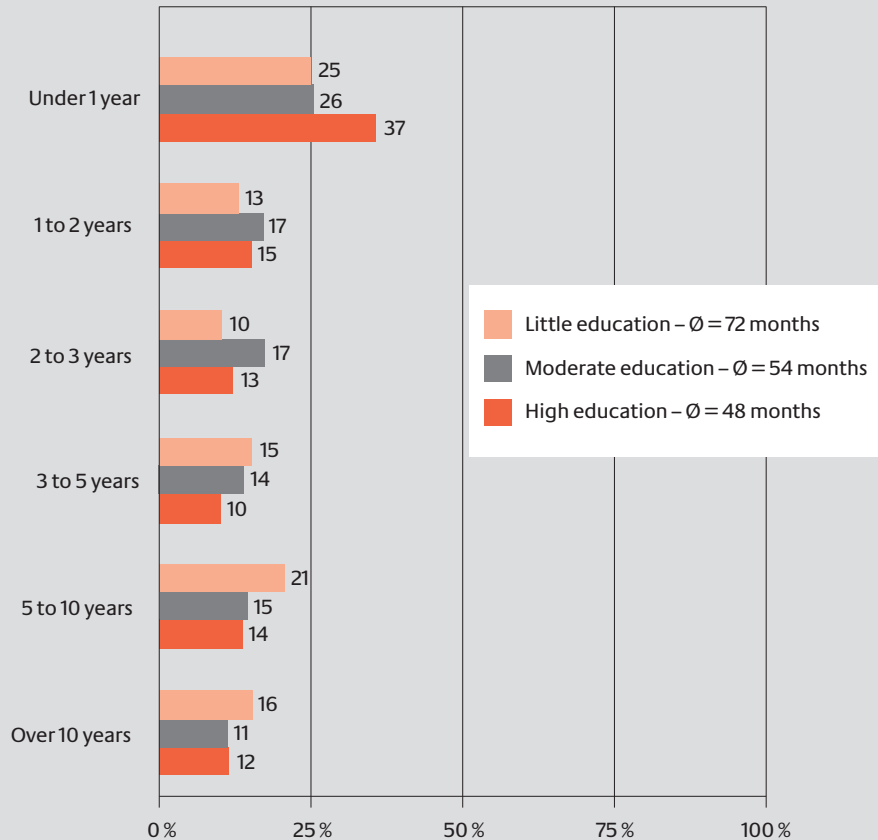
- Women with **higher education** endeavour to keep their family-related career break relatively short out of consideration for their occupational position. The average duration of their career break is **48 months**.

Some women with academic training may well stay at home for several years. The motives for this are that they want to devote themselves entirely to the child and avoid too great an age gap between the first and second child. However, only few of these women want to spend all their life as a “housewife and mother”: they cannot identify with the practised – traditional – role model. Most of the women who stay at home for a relatively long time gradually slide into this situation of a prolonged career break, particularly since practical and economic reasons initially favour the higher-income partner continuing to work full-time “at the beginning”. However, this situation gradually becomes increasingly inflexible as time passes and it becomes more and more difficult for the women to find their way back into the labour market process.

It is perhaps because of such fears that the majority of **52%** of women with an academic education stay at home for **two years at most**. **37%** keep their family-related career break down to **less than one year**, subsequently returning to their occupation.

In contrast to women with academic training, the career break of women with **little schooling** and simple vocational qualifications lasts two years longer on average, amounting to an average of **72 months** (this being beyond the 5-year mark).

Length of women's career break – differentiated by education –



Basis: Women who have previously experienced a family-related career break or are currently in that phase (n = 605 cases)

The reasons for these diverging “career break cultures” lie:

- In the **self-image** of the women: the majority of more highly educated women from modern social environments want a partnership based on equality as regards the household, child-raising and career. In contrast, a traditional gender identity and role model is often still dominant in today's lower class – the women generally receive no relief and support from their partner in their efforts to (re-)orient themselves in the working world.
- In the **material and organisational resources** needed for reconciling family and career: women from the upper segments usually have the money and the cultural resources as regards networking, enabling them to themselves create the necessary framework conditions for their return to work.
- In the demands resulting from the **occupational position**: more highly educated women are more often to be encountered in positions of responsibility. Many of these women endeavour to maintain contact with their employer or the working world after giving birth to a child, in order to retain their position or at least return to a job with equal/equivalent qualifications. In addition, women in management positions are exposed to greater competitive pressure: there are fewer alternatives once someone else has been given the job.

The **motivation to return to work** is great and only declines after a long career break. For example, the desire to return to work of women who have interrupted their careers for more than 5 years shows an increase, only declining significantly when the break lasts for more than 10 years. Pronounced “habituation effects” are to be seen here. Women who have been at home for more than 10 years have usually lost touch with their old workplace and the working world; because of the length of the break, they display anxieties regarding vocational reintegration, which can also be more like a completely new start in view of technical innovations and changes in working life.

- | **46%** of those women whose career break has lasted **one year** have the firm intention to return to gainful employment in the near future, while a further 33% could well imagine doing so.
- | Of those whose career break has lasted between **5 and 10 years**, **49%** would definitely like to go back to work in the near future, while a further 23% could certainly imagine returning to working life.
- | **33%** of the women who were last in employment **over 10 years ago** want to get back into the labour market in the near future, and a further 22% could imagine doing so and would be prepared to make an effort to succeed.

The **desire to return to work** is clearly related to the **age of the women**: the younger a woman is when she experiences a family-related career break, the stronger is the desire to go back to work. Career-building and the acquisition of important qualifications are essential motives here.

- | **82%** of the women **up to the age of 30** who are currently not in employment for family-related reasons would like to return to the working world in the near future.
- | This is the case for **58%** of the women between the **ages of 30 and 49** who are currently not in employment for family-related reasons.
- | **30%** of the women **over the age of 50** who once interrupted their career for family-related reasons (and also some who never went to work) would like to return to working life.

The **desire to return to working life** also depends on the **number of children in the household**:

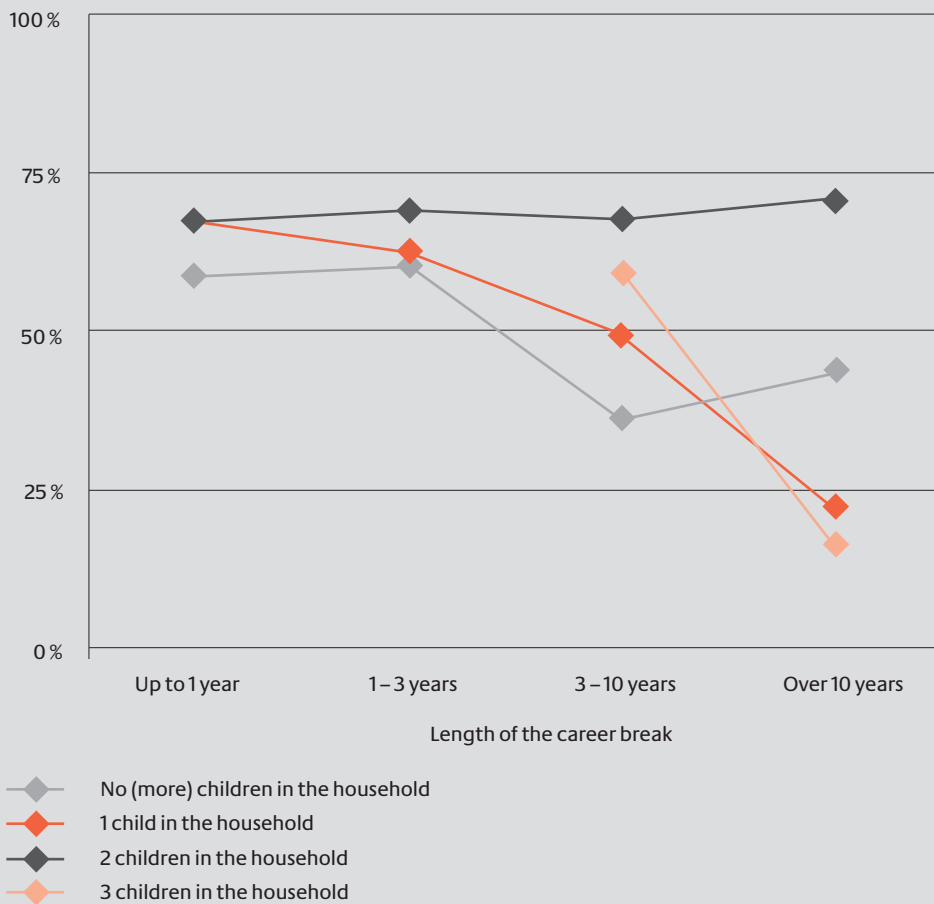
- | **53%** of the women with **one child** in the household who are currently experiencing a career break for family-related reasons have the express desire to return to employment in the near future. The principal motives here are occupational continuity, keeping in touch or preserving prospects and opportunities, but also a life beyond child-raising and cooking.
- | It is highly significant that the desire to return to work increases greatly among women with two children under the age of 18 in the household: **69%** of the women with **two children to be looked after** want to go back to work in the near future. Mainly financial motives additionally come into play here, and also – owing to the relatively long career break – the need for social contact outside the “mother-and-child sphere” and the desire for the self-esteem that comes with going to work.

Among women with **three or more children to be looked after**, the proportion of women who would like to return to work in the near future drops to **35%**. Sometimes, the traditional gender role is the preferred life model here, while the normative power of the facts and plain sense is the decisive factor on other occasions: with three or more (young) children in the house, it is impossible to simultaneously combine family duties and a career without help and structural changes on the part of employers and in the field of childcare.

It is clear that women’s desire to return to work is highly dependent on the number of children (still) living in the household and on the length of the career break to date. However, this relationship is in no way linear.

The following graph illustrates this relationship. The desire to return to work is plotted on the y-axis, the length of the career break on the x-axis. The lines in the diagram represent women with different numbers of children (in the household!).

Desire of women to return to work – differentiated by number of children in the household and length of career break –



Basis: Women currently experiencing a family-related career break
Missing values for "3 and more children" = too few cases

The findings are remarkable because not all lines take the same course.

- | As illustrated by the curve for *women with one child in the household*, the desire of these women to return to work gradually declines as the length of the career break increases.
- | The hypothesis was plausible that this would apply even more to *women with three or more children in the household*. This hypothesis was confirmed.
- | However, it is striking to note that *women with two children in the household* do not follow this logical pattern: their desire to return to work is very great and remains so – even if the career break has already lasted for many years. The desire to go to work even increases in cases of a career break lasting more than 10 years, since the children become more and more independent and the women have growing freedom again. So, women's return to work in this case is independent of the length of the career break.

Qualitative concomitant research reveals a number of reasons and motives for these findings:

Women with two children (to be looked after) in the household have such a pronounced desire to return to working life because, on the one hand, they feel the financial pressure to offer their children the resources necessary for improving their starting opportunities, primarily schooling (private school?) and higher education, culture and travel, leisure activities and sport, etc.⁵ On the other hand, a substantial portion of these mothers sees their child-raising time as a temporary *phase* and not as an exclusive life model.

In contrast, the desire of women with one child in the household to return to work decreases with increasing length of the career break because the idea of having a second child takes more concrete shape: these women face the critical question of whether it makes sense to return to work after three or five years if they would like to have a second child.

Women with three or more children to be looked after in the household are often of the (realistic) opinion that (without the support of their partner) they would have only little time for the free capacities that they would put to occupational use. Given this situation, it is remarkable to note that more than 50% of the women who interrupted their career less than 10 years ago have a desire to return to the working world. If, on the other hand, the career was interrupted more than 10 years ago, the desire to go back drops to less than 20%. There are various, overlapping reasons for this: women in this situation may be uncertain about whether they have the necessary professional skills (rapid advances in the occupational field?), worried about failing, or too accustomed to the partnership and family model they have been living.

⁵ Cf. Merkle/Wippermann (2008): Eltern unter Druck. Selbstverständnisse, Befindlichkeiten und Bedürfnisse von Eltern in verschiedenen Lebenswelten. A social science study by Sinus Sociovision on behalf of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V., Stuttgart.

The curve for women who do not, or no longer, have children in the household (the grey line in the above graph) is remarkable – more or less as a benchmark: not being in employment is the natural life model for some of them – mostly traditional older women. In the first three years after interrupting their career, the majority of these (childless) women definitely want to go to work again. However, the desire to return to work declines significantly if the career break lasts for more than three years. But this does not mean that these women give up: it is an important finding that, after not being employed for more than 10 years, these women again increasingly develop a desire for an income of their own and a working life.

IV.

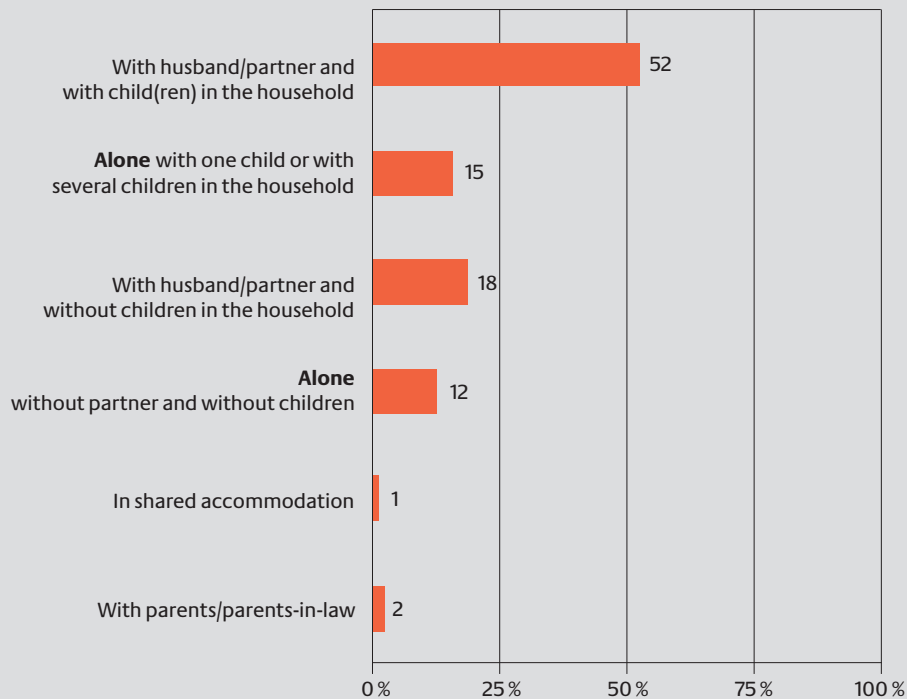
Domestic framework conditions

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Living situation

The great majority (85%) of women who have previously experienced, or are currently experiencing, a family-related career break live with a partner. 15% of the women live without a partner with one or more children. Among the single mothers, the motives for returning to work are mostly dominated by the need to secure an income to maintain the family, although even in partnerships, the woman's earnings are increasingly becoming an indispensable part of ensuring a livelihood for the family. For women with and without a partner alike, the return to work is closely related to the framework conditions necessary for doing so.

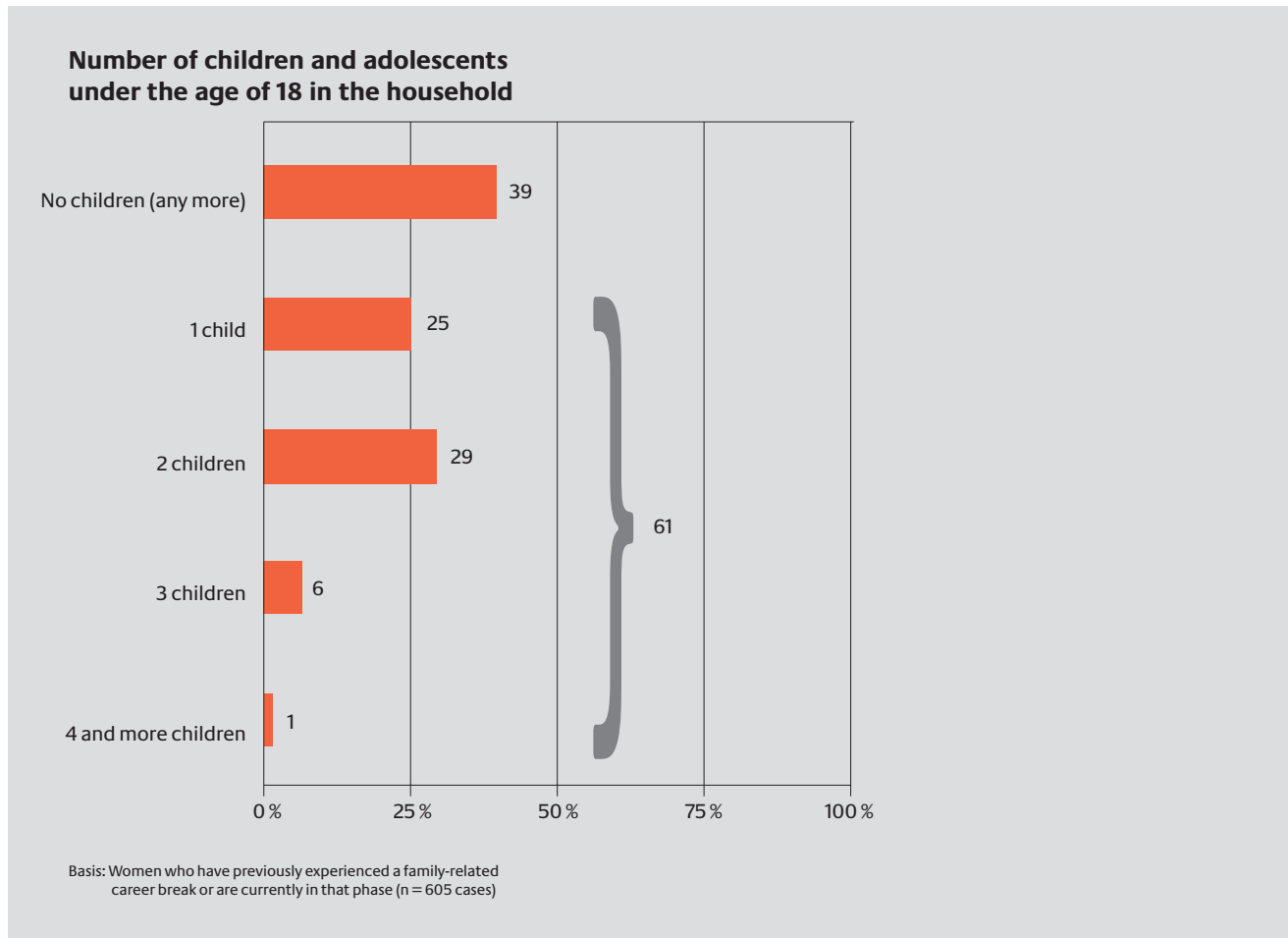
Living situation



Basis: Women who have previously experienced a family-related career break or are currently in that phase (n = 605 cases)

Number of children under 18 in the household

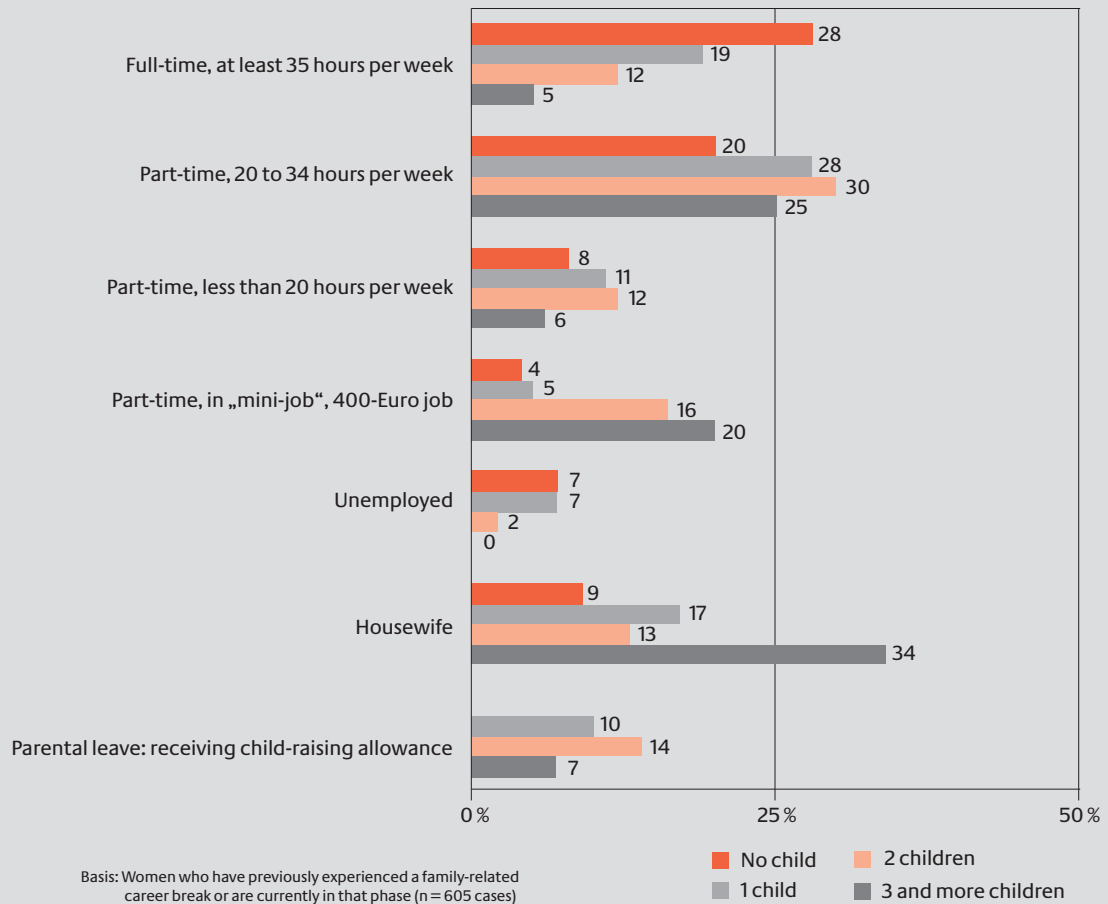
BeIn the case of 39% of the women who have interrupted their career for family-related reasons on at least one occasion, the children no longer live in the household. Conversely, this means that there are children under the age of 18 living in the household of 61% of the women between the ages of 18 and 65 who have at least once experienced, or are currently experiencing, a career break.



Employment and number of children

There is seen to be a significant **relationship between the number of children and the extent of employment** of women in Germany.

Employment of women with a career break – differentiated by number of children in the household –



- | This relationship is most marked among women in **full-time employment**: only 5% of the women with 3 and more children are employed full-time, compared to 19% of the women with one child and 28% of the women with no children.
- | The most commonly practised working model for mothers is the **part-time job** with 20–34 hours per week: this form of employment apparently offers the best opportunity to achieve a balance between work (opportunity for earning money, but also for personal development) and family (time for caring completely for the children). Women with two children, in particular, are disproportionately often to be found working in a part-time job for 20–34 hours per week.
- | Self-image as a **housewife**: the majority (34%) of women with three and more children, in particular, see themselves as housewives – for the duration of this phase in their lives. This is not surprising in view of the duties in this period of active child-raising and caring. The proportion of women with “mini-jobs” is highest (20%) among women with three or more children to be cared for in the household. However, it is at the same time a fact that a further 25% of the women with three and more children go to work for 20–34 hours per week.
- | Conversely, 9% of the women whose children are today over the age of 18 and no longer live in the household (continue to) see themselves as housewives. It is a social and political signal that 91% of women in the “empty-nest phase”, i.e. whose children no longer live at home, are in employment or actively looking for a job: 58% of these women work more than 20 hours per week, 28% full-time.

V.

Motives for returning to work

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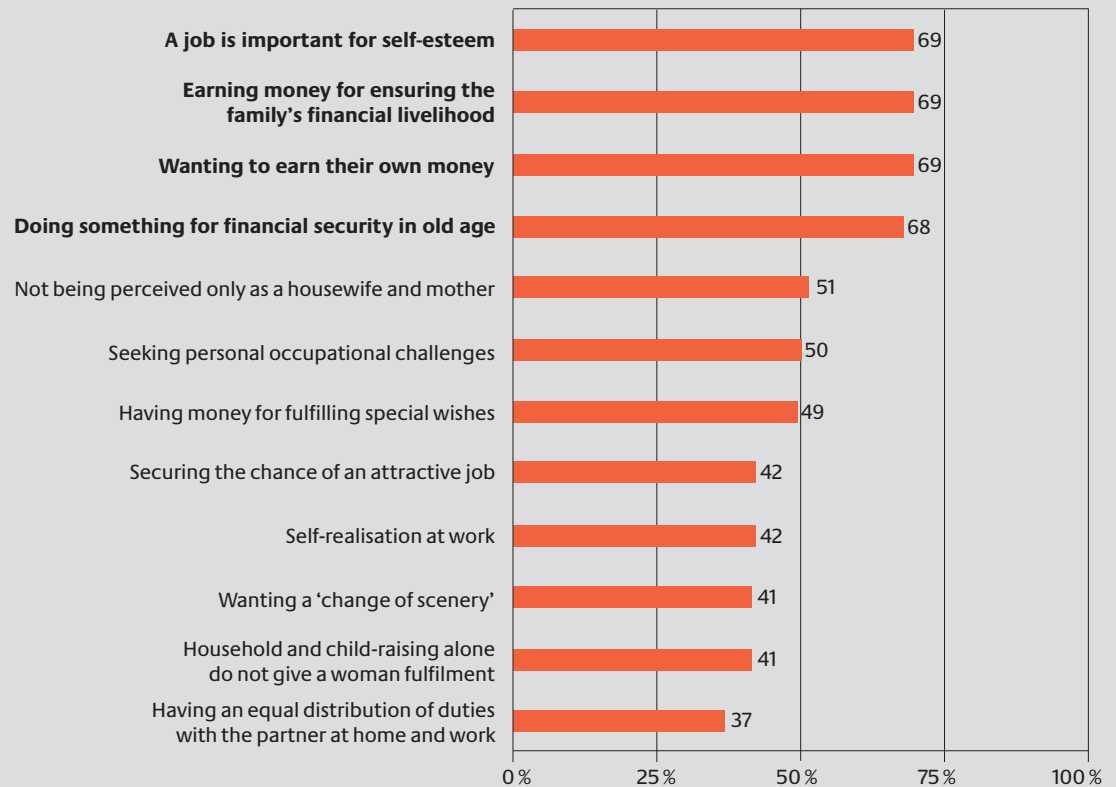
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Self-esteem, financial security, independence

For women, there is **not just one motive** for returning to working life. These diverse motives are not mutually exclusive, but often complement and overlap each other.⁶ Consequently, a woman generally has several motives at once for returning to the working world, although they are not all of equal importance.

Women's most important motives for returning to work



Basis: Women who have previously experienced a family-related career break or are currently in that phase (n=605 cases)

■ Agree entirely
= Top box of the measurement on a scale from 1 to 4

⁶ As a result of multiple responses, the percentages given below do not add up to 100.

Analysis reveals **four central motives that** are “very strong” in roughly **70%** of women. In this context, it is interesting to note that material and non-material motives play an equally great role as regards the desire to return to work:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|--------------|
| Self-esteem | } | non-material |
| Independence | | |
| Ensuring a livelihood for the family | } | material |
| Financial security in old age | | |

All in all, there is a high degree of correlation between these motives; at the same time, however, the one motive is not a function of the other:

- | Making a personal contribution to ensuring a livelihood for the family is important for self-esteem. However, self-esteem consists of more than just being a financial pillar of the family.
- | Doing something for one’s own financial security in old age is important for the feeling of independence – but independence means more than having money in old age.

The various other motives are also important for women when considering a return to work. They appear to be more concrete expressions and manifestations of the four principal motives. Apart from the four dominant principal motives, women are concerned on a **second motive level** with ...

- | ... their self-image, their gender identity, their role image: women who return to work do not want (or no longer want) to be perceived only as housewives and mothers.
- | ... the search for their own occupational challenges: achievement, commitment, self-development.
- | ... monetary resources for fulfilling special wishes: travel, clothes, house, furnishings.

One of the clear findings is that most women “*do not find fulfilment in the household and child-raising*” (strong agreement with this statement: 41%; general agreement: 76%), “*want and need a change of scenery*” (strong agreement: 41%; general agreement: 77%) – and have the self-confidence and qualifications not only to face occupational challenges, but to tackle them with commitment.

And for 37% of women taking a break from their career, vocational reintegration is a decisive step for **returning to** her ideal and her (shared) **life model based on equal distribution of duties at home and work** and for moving in this direction again following the phase of involuntary retraditionalisation.

Self-realisation is a very important motive for 41% of women when it comes to returning to work. Although self-realisation is a very important value today, one that has the ranking of a legitimating force, the other motives mentioned are today dominant in the context of vocational reintegration. **For women returning to working life, self-esteem is more important than self-realisation.**

- | The “self-realisation” motive has two sides: for the protagonists of the emancipation movement in the 1960s/1970s, self-realisation was both a life maxim and a political slogan, while the opponents from the conservative and bourgeois camps – who bore the brunt of the attacks – interpreted and discredited self-realisation (in those days) as female egotism that ignored the needs of the family and a woman’s duties as a wife.
- | The latest data from 2008 show that the motive of self-realisation is today accepted in all segments of society, because it has lost its radical connotations, and that self-realisation is apparently greatly overestimated as a motive for women going to work. Conclusion: self-realisation is *relative* (and *relatively* important); the motive should not be ideologised again in the debate. Women today have other motives for going or returning to work.

Motives for returning to work change with the length of the career break

Taking into account the different length of the career break, significant differences can be seen in women’s motives for returning to working life.

For women who have **not been employed for more than 10 years**, the strongest motive for possibly returning to work is the importance of work for their self-esteem. Earning their own money takes second place, followed by financial security in old age. Far less pronounced is the desire for a different distribution of roles. These women wrangle less with their role as housewife and mother, do not long for a change of scenery as much as younger women, and do not necessarily want to return to work for reasons of self-realisation. Many have financial security through their partner (they would otherwise not have been able to stop going to work for such a long time). But they nevertheless have the desire to earn *their own* money and secure themselves financially.

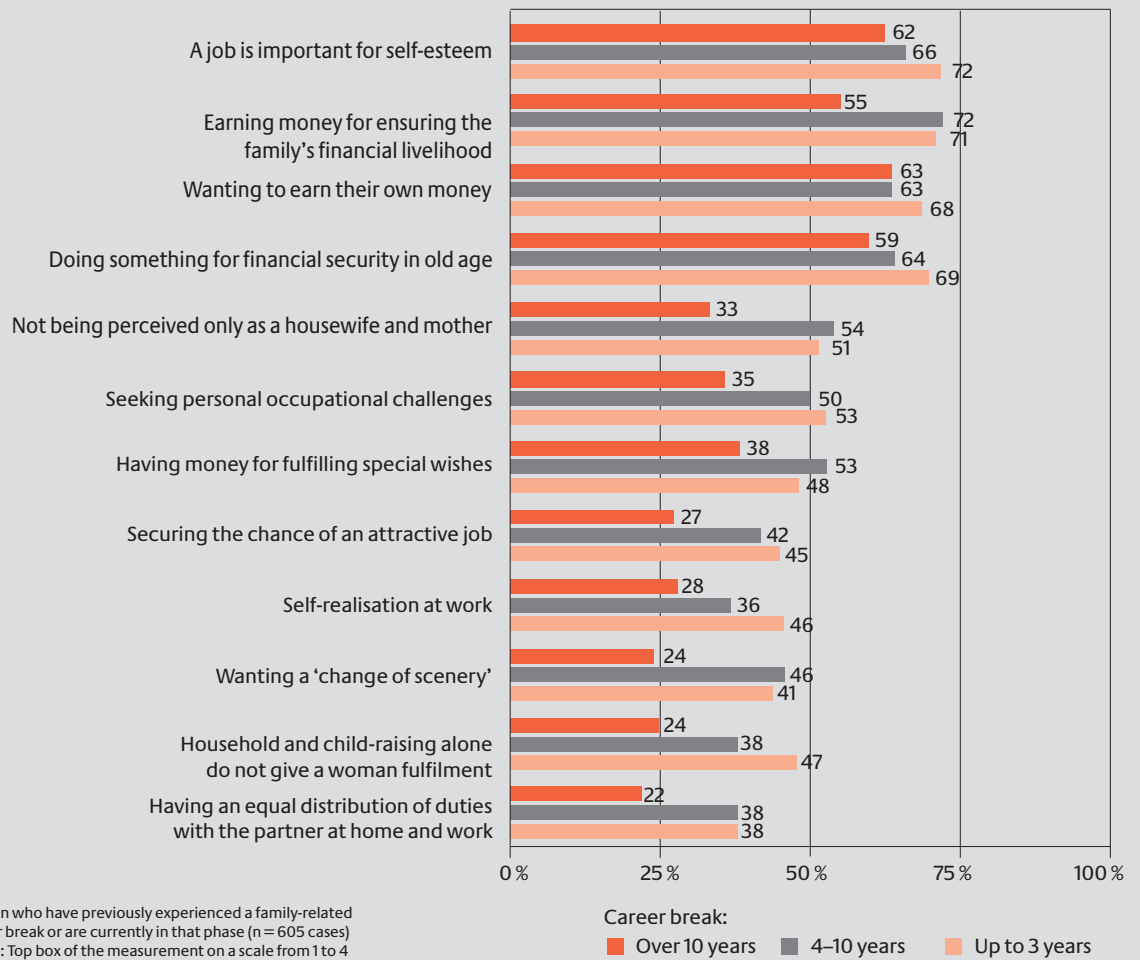
The motive of financial security in old age is decidedly important for young women and **women who have interrupted their career for up to 3 years**. It can clearly be seen here that a) the single-breadwinner model is becoming less important, b) women today reckon with the possibility of a marriage no longer lasting a lifetime, and c) these women assume that their husband’s pension/widow’s pension will no longer provide sufficient security.

Young women tend to keep their family-related career break relatively short and return to working life after two to three years (exceptions confirm this trend). Again, the strongest motive here is self-esteem, following by ensuring a livelihood and providing for financial security in old age. Far stronger among young women than among women who practise the traditional breadwinner model for a long period in their biography are the attitude (and self-perception) that the household and child-raising do not offer them fulfilment, the desire for occupational challenges, the need to realise themselves in their work, and the opportunity of getting an attractive job.

“In between” comes the highly interesting group of women who have **interrupted their career for 4 to 10 years**. Their children are “over the worst” and the women can (and want to) focus more on their own lives, and also their occupational ambitions. They have three particularly noticeable wishes:

- (1) They no longer want to be perceived *only* as mothers and housewives; they do not want to get stuck in a traditional distribution of roles that poses the threat of becoming unchangeable.
- (2) The wish to have money in order to be able to fulfil special wishes – for the family and for themselves.
- (3) The desire for a “change of scenery”: the work done for the family and the household is routine, often monotonous and offers no (more) attractive challenges in itself.

**Women’s motives for returning to work
– differentiated by length of career break –**



In biographical terms, these women see themselves as being in a phase that decides whether they remain lifelong housewives and mothers, thus following the model of their own parents, which is not very attractive for them, or whether they take things into their own hands and re-orient themselves once more by taking up occupational challenges and experiencing new things.

Returning to work must also be worth while financially

During a family-related career break, women ask themselves whether going back to work would be financially worth while for them at all. And if they do start working again, they gauge this against their personal, monthly *net* income (not the figures in their tax returns or the tax assessment notice at the end of the year).

A substantial proportion of (potential) women returning to work 1) put off their return to work for the reason that is it financially not worth while, or 2) drop out of working life again, arguing that it is financially not worth while for them to go to work – after deducting expenditure on childcare, mobility, domestic help and the like. These patterns of argumentation and behaviour clearly reflect effects caused by limited financial incentives in the tax and transfer system (Tax Bracket V, non-contributory co-insurance).

- | **Defensive:** Of the women who interrupted their career for family-related reasons in the past and have not yet returned to working life, 62% state that the reason for this is that going to work would not be financially worth while for them. This view is expressed by 66% of women who have interrupted their career for several years (more than 5 years).
- | **Disillusioned:** Of the women who interrupted their career for family-related reasons in the past, but then returned to working life, 51% state that their job is not financially worth while for them. The figure is even as high as 55% among women who have interrupted their career for several years (more than 5 years).

VI.

Experiences when returning to work

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The return to work is adaptive and individually different

Today, there is not (or no longer) just *one* pattern for interrupting employment for family-related reasons and later returning to work. Rather, we find **differentiation and individualisation** of plans and implemented paths: the single pattern has in the meantime been replaced by a variety of channels for returning to work, these being dependent partly on the respective external framework conditions and partly on individual notions.

In this context, the **borderlines** between the career break and the return to working life are becoming increasingly **blurred** and overlap. The “career break” and the “return to work” are today no longer large, separate blocks with a temporally clear dividing line. The borders between the phases are today indistinct and there are individually structured transitional phases. For example, many women keep in touch with their employer during their parental leave, or spend a few hours per week in the office in order to hear of important developments and decisions and “stay on the ball”. On the other hand, some withdraw entirely from working life – also emotionally – for a time and are happy to be able to devote themselves entirely to their children.

Only for some women is the return to work a single step – in cases where the career break lasts just a few months and where the family-related occasion is the first or *only* child. For the majority of women, however, the return to work is above all a **process** that takes place more or less successively in different stages. Especially women with more than one child take a gradual approach towards resuming increasingly extensive employment – motivated by endeavours to reconcile family and career in such a way that not only do things “work out” in organisational terms, but also that they themselves, their children and the family as a whole can find a balance. Consequently, different transitional forms can be seen when it comes to a return to working life, such as freelance work or employment for a few hours per week.

Preparatory work by the man and family management by the woman

For the majority of women, vocational reintegration following a family-related career break entails major practical and emotional challenges.

- | Household and child-raising duties have to be re-negotiated.
- | The search for a suitable day-care place for the child(ren) is often protracted and problematic. The availability of day-care places, particularly for children under the age of three, continues to be an obstacle to returning to work after just a short time.
- | A considerable proportion of women do not return to their old workplace or their former position at all and want to (or have to) completely re-orient themselves in the working world.
- | The situation at the workplace may have changed (assignment of spheres of responsibility, colleagues, etc.). The woman returning to work does so in a new situation and under changed conditions.

In view of the varied and numerous demands and obstacles that a return to work involves for women, the **support of the partner and the family** plays a special role. Emotional and practical support is the focus of the experiences and wishes of women when returning to working life. In this respect, there is the positive finding that 80% of women feel or felt that their partners supported their desire to return to work.

At the same time, the independent and lasting assumption of more responsibility and duties on the part of the partner and the children is a learning process to which all concerned adapt only gradually. Women experience practical support from their husbands/partners primarily in the form of assumption of activities in the household (60%): this mostly means the performance of selected, individual jobs and often ranks as *preparatory work*. If the children are old enough, they likewise take on – more – duties (53%). However, it usually remains the task of the women alone to keep an eye on everything, organise the household and the children, and distribute duties – their partners provide little or no relief in this respect. The **requirements profile of women is becoming increasingly complex** as a result: they have to cope simultaneously not only with their vocational reintegration (which frequently means not a *return* to the same workplace, but a new start), but also with management within the family and the household, as well as management of the combination of family and career.

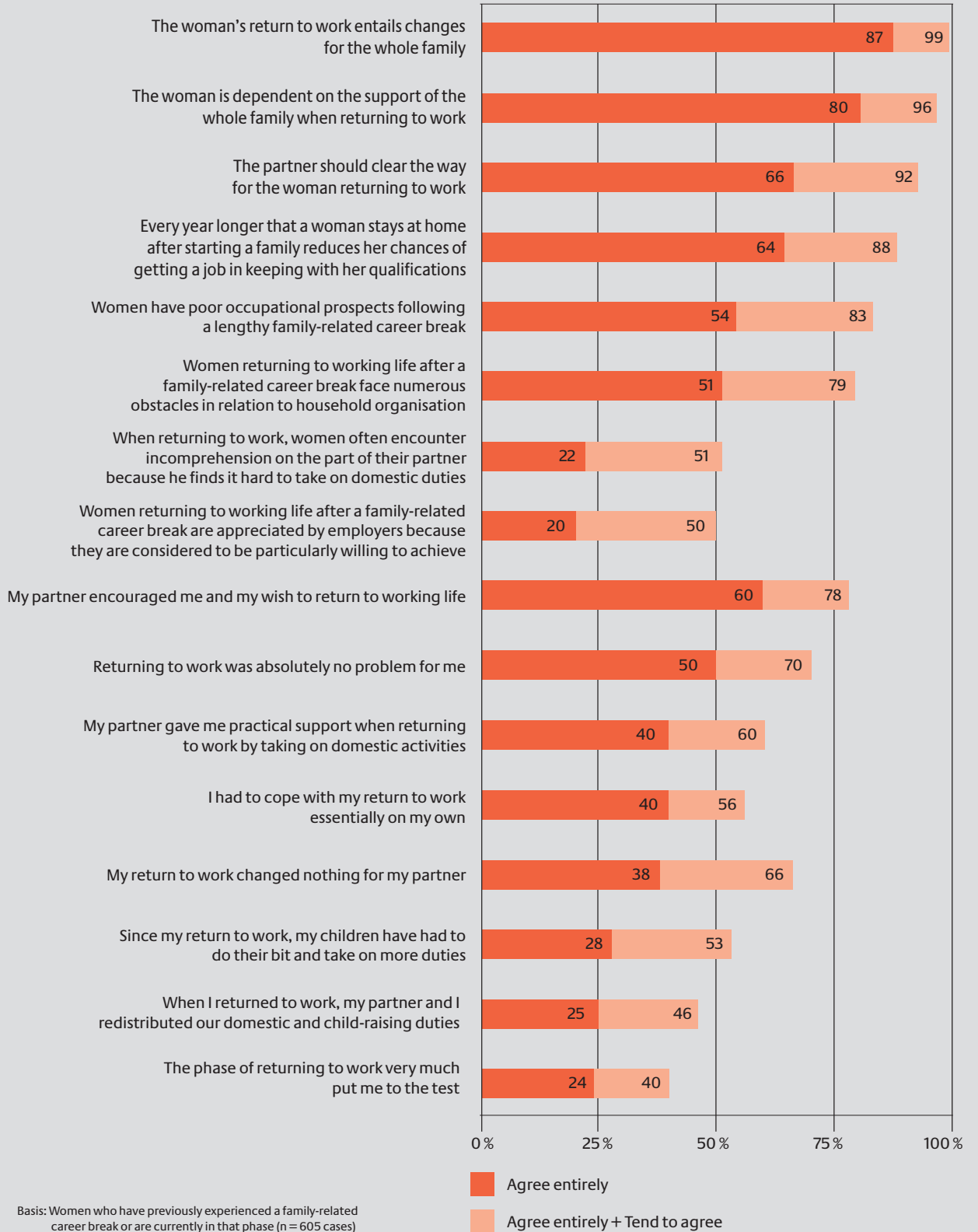
In total, 40% of women say that the phase of returning to work very much put them to the test, and 56% that they have to (or had to) cope with their return to work *essentially* on their own – whereas (absolutely) nothing changes or changed for their partners. Given this situation, it is hardly surprising that 27% of women returning to work seriously think about **giving up work** again because they are unable to reconcile family and career for lack of support.

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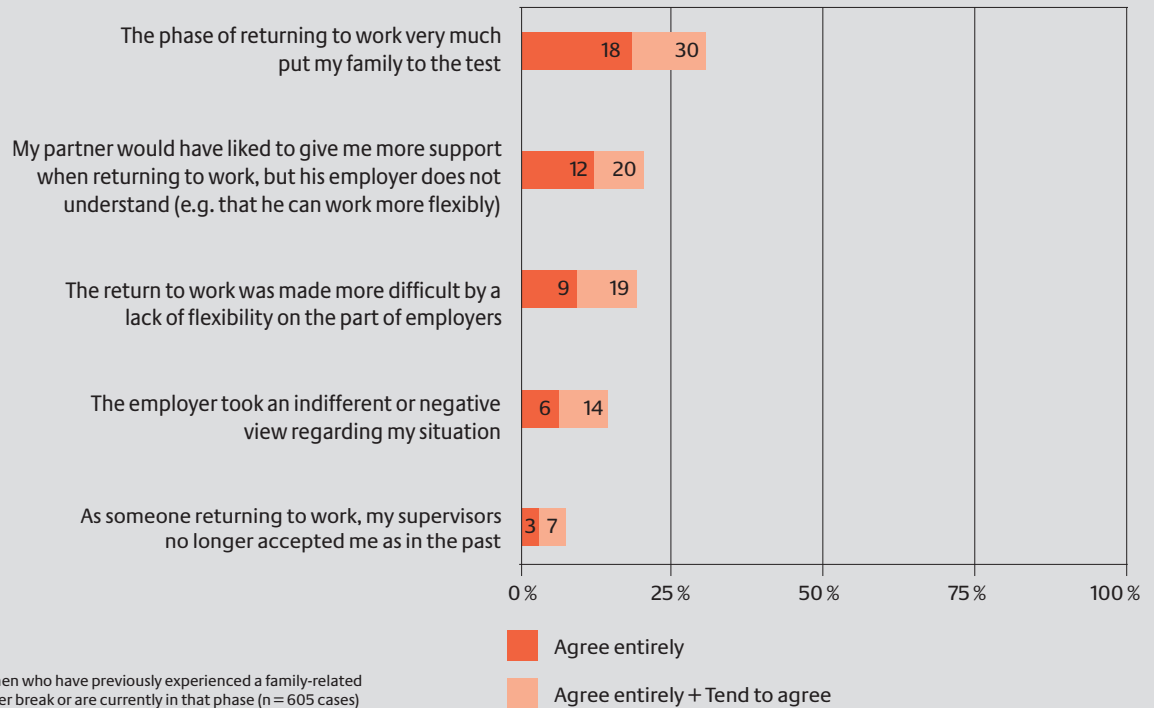
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Women's experiences when returning to working life



Women's experiences when returning to working life (contd.)



Men and women have a different perception of the burden of returning to work

Men's perspective is characterised by **empathy** for their wives/partners, but also by a **defensive attitude** when it comes to the practical consequences. The attitudes and perceptions of women and men match when it comes to the fundamental occupational perspective of women. However, there is a striking difference in the perception/recollection of men and women when it comes to the practical consequences, the explicit distribution of duties and the psychological burden.

- 82% of the men state that they encouraged their partner's wish to return to work. This is also perceived as being the case by 80% of the women.
- 80% of the men state that they supported their partner's return to work in practical terms by taking on activities in the household. However, only 60% of the women returning to work say this.⁷
- 43% of the men state that their partner's return to work did not change anything for them. If the women are asked, 56% have this impression.
- 38% of the men state that the children have also had to do their bit and take on duties since their partner returned to work. However, 53% of the women returning to work say so.

⁷ When interpreting these responses, it must be remembered that men and women in no way pour their whole hearts out to an interviewer who is a stranger to them; rather, they tend to express a harmonious and willing-to-help attitude as partners. Consequently, the discrepancies are probably even greater in reality than can be captured by a survey.

- | 34% of the men state that their partner had to cope with the return to work essentially on her own. However, 56% of the women see their return to work this way.
- | 16% of the men state that the phase of the return to work very much put the *family* to the test. 30% of the women say the same in relation to the *family*.
- | 12% of the men state that *they themselves* are very much put to the test by their partner's return to work. However, 40% of the women think that they *themselves* are put to the test by their return to work.

These figures are a clear indication of the fact that there are major **discrepancies between the perceptions of men and women** as regards the distribution of tasks and the burden borne during the return to work. Women's return to work often leads to a major, one-sided extra burden on the woman and to primarily immaterial solidarity and only selective support on the part of the partner.

Only 7% of the women returning to work state that their partners reduced their own working hours to enable them to take up employment again. And: the longer the break in the woman's career lasts, the less willing the men are to cut back their own work. So, the men are called upon to act – although they, too, need the right framework conditions, above all acceptance at their own workplace and social acceptance in the environment of their private life. That, however, is closely linked to the sociocultural development of images of roles and men.

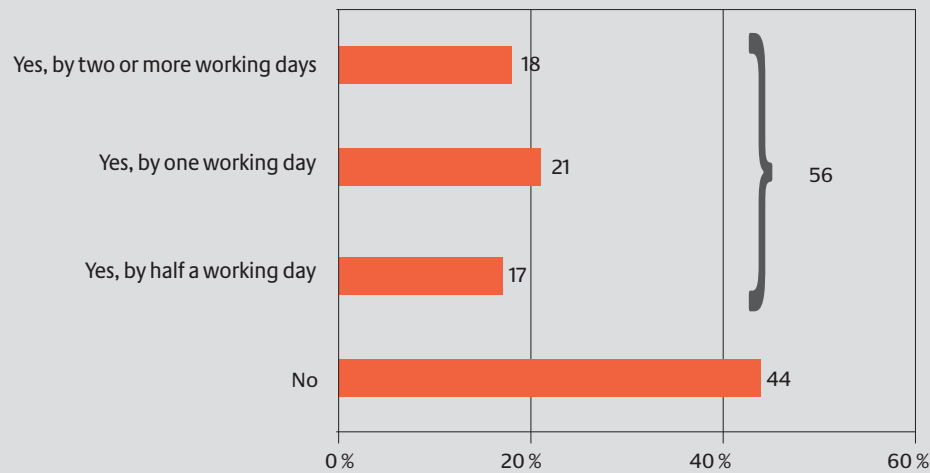
Men are only theoretically willing to reduce their working hours

It is a sobering fact – but can also be interpreted as a “start” – that, up to now, 7% of the men have cut back their own occupational activity in favour of their partner's employment. It must be borne in mind in this context that this percentage also includes the men who have not reduced their regular, contractual weekly working hours, but “just” do less overtime.

Men's view of the future is decidedly positive: roughly half of the men who work full-time, or for more than 20 hours per week in a part-time job, and whose partners are currently not in employment display a fundamental, theoretical willingness to reduce their regular working hours if that makes it easier for their partner to return to work.

This high percentage is surprising and diametrically opposed to current practice. These responses no doubt need to be put into perspective insofar as effects of social desirability greatly influenced the replies: expressing willingness in an interview is easy, but putting it into practice – with all its personal, family-related and occupational consequences (and their interactions) – is a different matter. Nevertheless, the effects of social desirability must not be so strongly emphasised that the willingness expressed by the men is obscured. We must take these men seriously (and the women must then also take them by their word) and help them eliminate the obstacles and barriers encountered by men in this respect.

Willingness of men to reduce their regular working hours



Basis: Men working full-time, or more than 20 hours per week in a part-time job, and whose partner is currently not in employment; n = 224 cases

Childcare is not geared to the needs of working parents

One of the central questions before and during a mother's return to work is: Who's going to look after the children? Women who already want to return to their occupation, and also to their workplace, after a year often find that places for children under the age of three are not available in sufficient numbers or of adequate quality. But even at a later stage, uninterrupted childcare (kindergarten, primary school, secondary school) is often not guaranteed.

The main problem is the **lack of dependable and flexible childcare**: anyone in employment today is generally expected as a matter of course to be available to the employer and mobile, even at short notice. 75% of the women returning to work complain that the childcare times in kindergarten and core-time supervision in school are geared to women not being in employment, or only to a small extent. Above all, the concepts make no provision for full-time working mothers.

According to the logic of many childcare facilities, the mothers are the natural persons to contact. If mothers go to work, then they have to be available to the childcare facility at all times – not the other way round. It is “natural” to ring the mother at work if the child is not feeling well or is ill. The working mother then faces a dilemma: whatever she decides, it's a mistake! So, it is hardly surprising that 70% of the women complain that **reconcilability is a difficult undertaking** and that they *occasionally* think about dropping out.

Prejudices and reservations regarding women returning to work are a burden for women

A substantial portion (40%) of women interrupting their career for family-related reasons do not return to their previous employer, but apply for a completely new job or go self-employed.⁸ For these women, the return to work involves special challenges, and also personal insecurities. They do not know

- 1) How the new employer will rate and apply their skills and qualities,
- 2) What the actual demands at the new workplace will be, including the demands on time,
- 3) How family and career can be reconciled in practice. However, women who return to their old workplace and their previous position also often do so under changed conditions: at the workplace, mothers often have to contend with the preconception that they are inflexible, not mobile, frequently cannot be used at all for time reasons and are occasionally not fully concentrated on their work because their thoughts are always with the child as well – and have to be.

Most women returning to work want to be seen and treated like any other female employee. They want neither discriminatory gentle treatment, nor exaggerated expectations – the former robs them of opportunities, while the latter exerts unreasonable pressure. However, reality paints a different picture: women who look into the option of returning to work during their career break occasionally feel stigmatised and sense that their colleagues approach them with reservations and prejudices.

- I** Correspondingly high is the number of women returning to work who have experienced the situation at the workplace that their colleagues approach them with prejudices (45%). There is a substantial and statistically significant increase in this figure in the case of women who return to the labour market after interrupting their careers for more than four years for family-related reasons. These women feel discredited as “housewives”, who are unaccustomed to the harsh climate of the working world, the speed of business life and the pressure of competition. For many colleagues, the label “woman returning to work after a family-related career break” goes hand-in-hand with the attitude that the woman has been away for a (very) long time, has lost touch professionally, technically (particularly as regards IT) and organisationally, and that it will take a lot of time and patience to “re-train” her.
- I** Very nearly one-third (32%) of the women who return to their old workplace or make a new start in working life feel shelved by the management: the women feel that they are treated like second-rate employees. This finding can be summed up as follows: the employer expects extensive mobility, flexibility and availability – and occasionally reacts with discriminatory gentle treatment. But that robs these women of career opportunities.

⁸ In this context, see Chapter VIII: “Occupational positions after returning to work”.

VII.

Weekly working hours of women returning to work

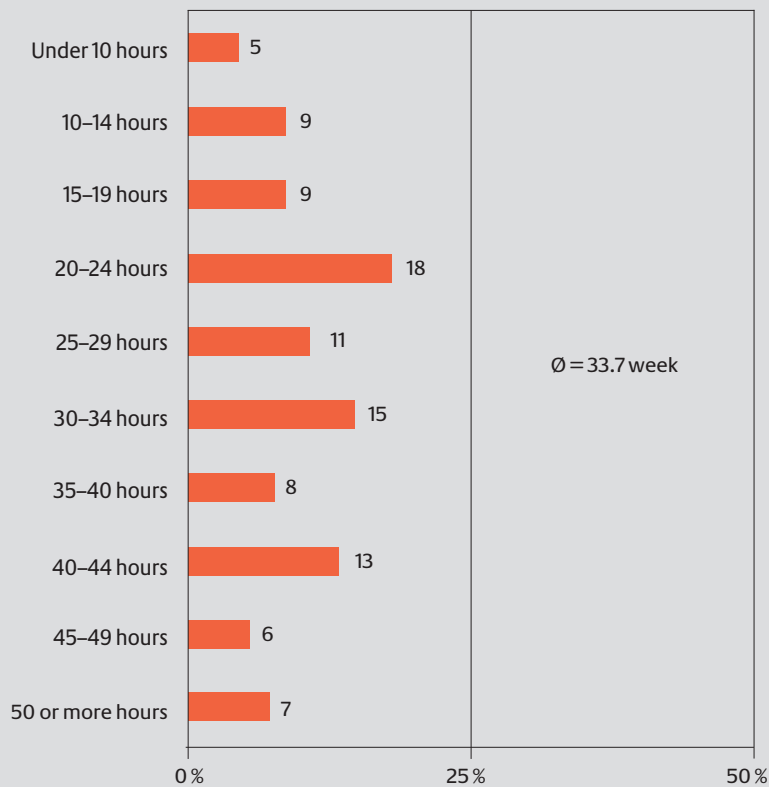
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For the entire working population, the average *actual* weekly working time is 48.5 hours. Men work an average of 56.1 hours, women an average of 39.6 hours per week for an employer or their own business.⁹ Women who return to working life after a career break work a weekly average of 33.7 hours.

Actual weekly working hours of women returning to work



Basis: Only women who have previously experienced a family-related career break and returned to working life (n = 273 cases)

⁹ Not the regular, contractual working hours are measured, but the actual weekly working hours. This includes recorded overtime, and also the time expended for the employer above and beyond the formally recorded overtime. This work actually to be done for the job decisively limits the time available for the family, as well as men's possibilities for playing an active part in reconciling family and career. At the same time, however, there is the finding that this unofficial extra work is partly necessary and partly voluntary commitment – and also an escape and a rational (alibi) argument for some men.

If the children have left home, the average weekly working time is 46.3 hours. The number of hours worked by employed women decreases, the more children under the age of 18 there are in the household:

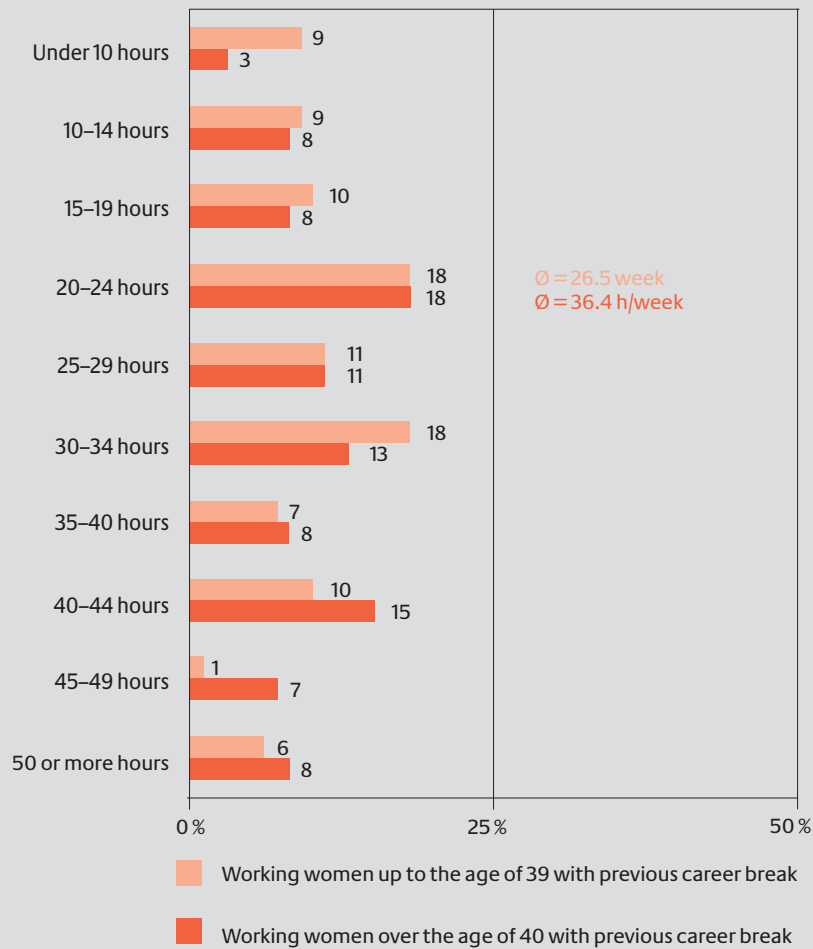
- | If there is still **one child** under the age of 18 in the household, the figure is 30.1 hours.
- | If there are **two children** under the age of 18 in the household, 24.2 hours.
- | And if there are **three children**, 21.7 hours.

This makes it clear that women with a “big family” certainly want (or have to) work more than half-time and already do so today.

A differentiated analysis strikingly reveals that, the older their offspring becomes, women returning to work successively increase the number of hours they work, progressing “step by step” – with the aim of not overtaxing either themselves or their child(ren). The older the children get, the greater the wish of women becomes to devote more time to their occupation. This corresponds to the observation regarding age: women who interrupt their career between the ages of 18 and 29 work an average of 25.9 hours per week. Between the ages of 30 and 39, the average is 27.3 hours, the weekly working time of women between the ages of 50 and 65 increasing to 47.4 hours (see graph below). Especially in families with several children, there is apparently a “glass ceiling” as regards the total number of hours of the joint employment of mother and father. As long as the father experiences his number of working hours as being rigidly defined, the number of hours worked by the mother is the variable that serves to coordinate the different needs for time and money. In these circumstances, the mother’s return to work takes place over an extended period of time, during which the mother does not realise her own career options. This indirectly confirms the prejudice of employers that the interests of women returning to work primarily focus on the family.

It is also apparent that weekly working times of 20–24 hours (roughly a half-time job with overtime) and 30–34 hours (roughly a three-quarter-time job with overtime) are more common than the average.

Weekly working hours of women returning to work 18 to 39 year-olds vs. 40 to 65 year-olds



In addition, a radical change can be seen in the way employment is viewed, distinguishing the generation of “traditional oldies” from “modern oldies”: while the previous generation, with a traditional gender identity and distribution of roles, “conceded” women the task of generating extra income, this being an existential necessity in some cases, today’s women over 50 are not prepared to settle for this and instead set out on a new occupational journey. This age cohort of the 50+ generation, commonly referred to by German-speaking marketing people as “Best-Agers” (and *unfortunately* stigmatised in this way), does not see the “empty-nest phase” as a brief intermezzo until reaching retiring age and a pension, but as a separate, new stage in life, one that offers new challenges, a host of opportunities and attractive prospects – if they demonstrate courage and commitment. Although they are always still there for their (semi-)adult children, also in financial terms, there are few demands on their time, and these women self-confidently claim the right, having reached the end of the active child-raising phase, to look after their own needs and goals (at last or again).

VIII.

Occupational positions after returning to work

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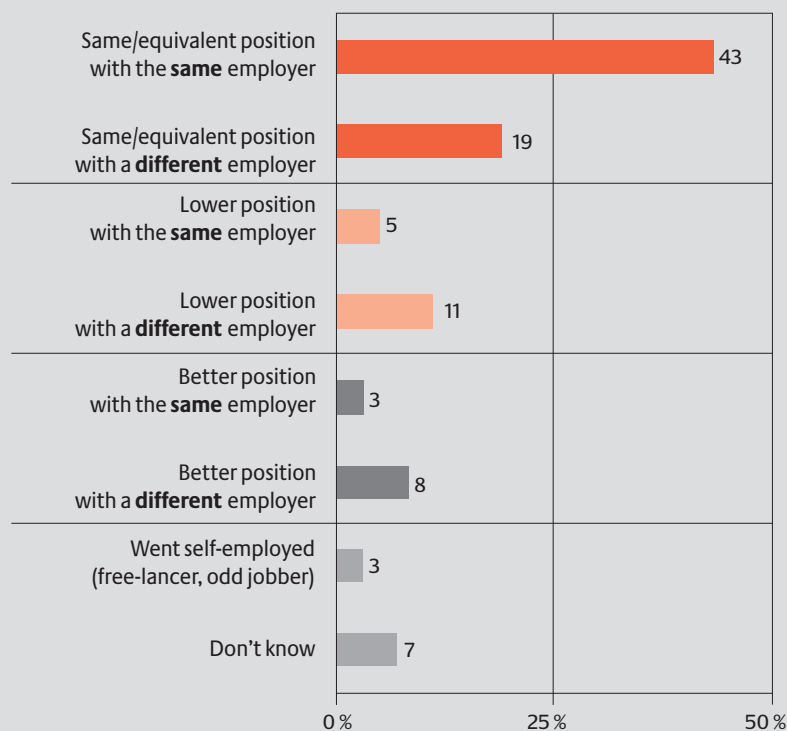
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All in all, 51% of women who return to the labour market following a family-related career break start back with their old employer. The figures are 68% in Eastern Germany and 48% in Western Germany. However, this in no way means the same job. The profile of duties and the job description generally change. The term “return to working life” is thus a more accurate description of the reality of these women’s lives than the term “vocational reintegration”.

When women return to working life,

- ▮ 63% start back in the same/an equivalent position (75% in the East, 60% in the West),
- ▮ 17% start back in a lower position (9% in the East, 18% in the West),
- ▮ 11% start back in a higher position (9% in the East, 12% in the West),
- ▮ 3% go into self-employment (0% in the East, 3% in the West),
- ▮ 7% of the respondents (8% in the East, 7% in the West) gave no reply here (since they cannot compare their new position with the previous one)

Comparison of positions before and after the return to work



Basis: Women who returned to working life following a family-related career break (n = 273 cases)

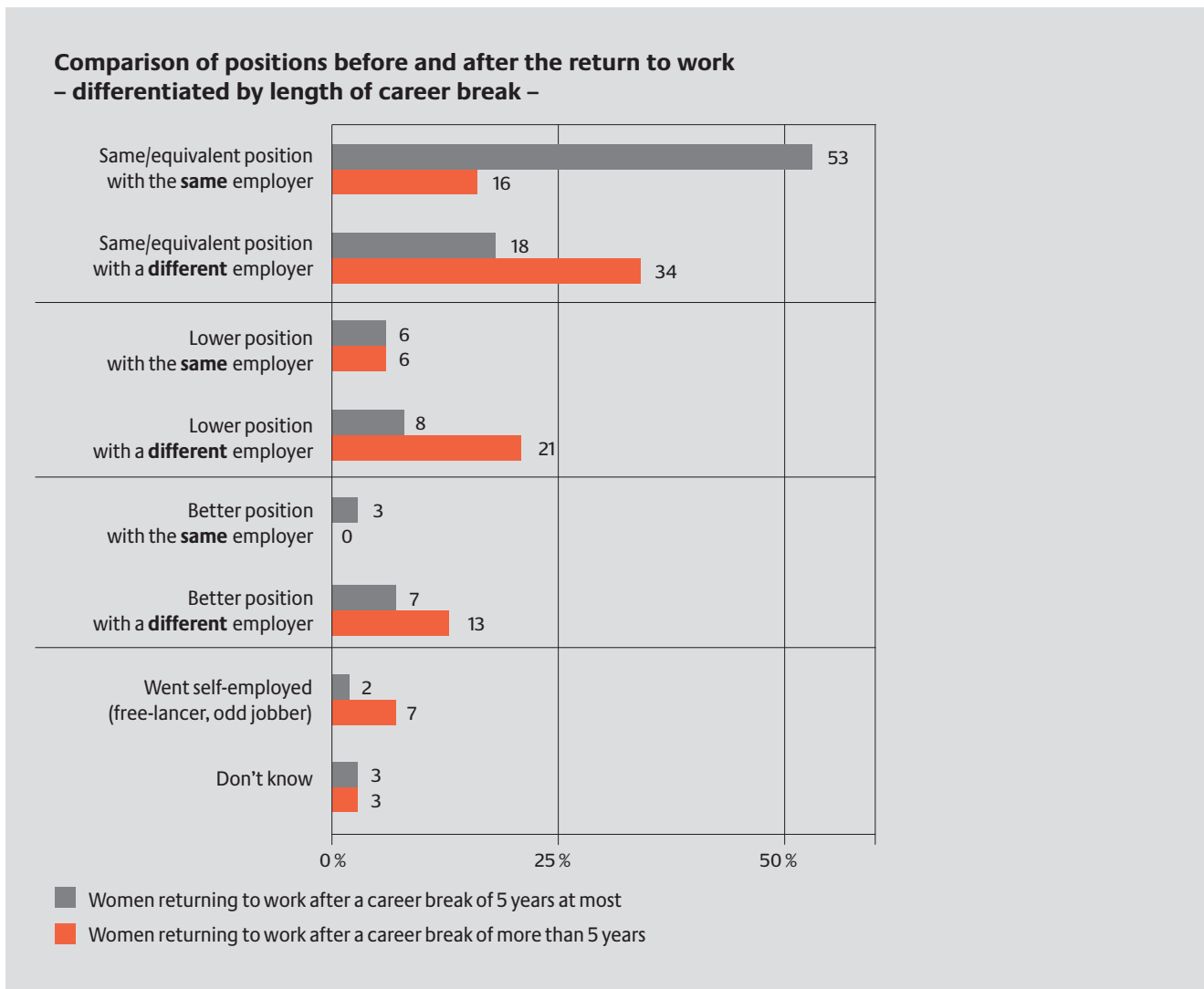
The length of the career break influences the occupational position

The actual position at the workplace is highly dependent on the length of the family-related interruption of the woman’s career: the data show that the **chance of getting an equivalent position** with the old employer is substantially smaller after being out of employment for more than five years. If a woman returns to work within five years, the chance of getting the same position, or even a better one, with the old employer is well over 50%. However, anyone aiming for a better position should examine the option of looking for a different employer. The probability of getting a better job is greater with a different employer.

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IX.

Dropping out of the return to work

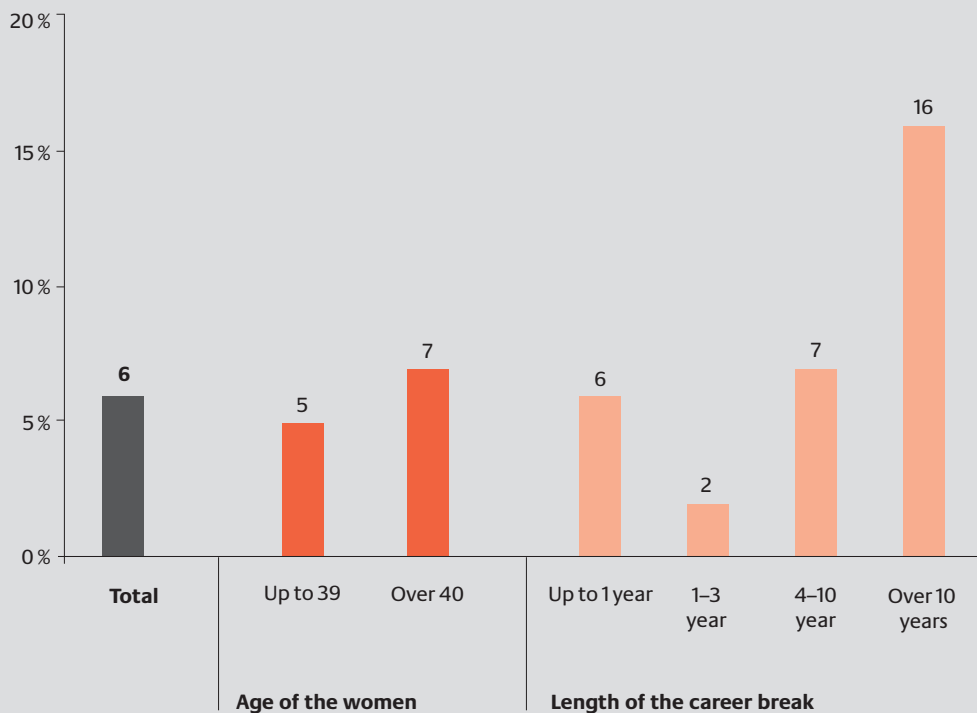
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Just under 6% of the women who return to working life following a family-related career break give up their job again after some time. The figures are 5.1% for the under-40s and 6.6% for the over-40s. The **length of the career break** plays a major role in this context: the longer a woman's family-related career break lasts, the more probable it is that she will drop out again. However, **the first year following the birth of the child is also critical**, leading to an above-average rate of drop-outs from an early return to work.

Women who again dropped out of the working world after returning to work



Basis: Women who have experienced a family-related career break and later returned to working life (n = 273)

In order not to endanger their positions and chances of promotion, some women keep in contact with their employers, their colleagues and work-related topics during their career break, returning to their job after a relatively short time. Some of these women's early return succeeds – as is known from both the quantitative and the qualitative studies – only under

frequently great emotional, social and financial burdens. Others step on the brakes after a time: they do not want to be constantly overtaxed and bending over backwards; they drop out of employment again in the certain knowledge that this is better for their children and for themselves – and intend to start again later.

From the statistical point of view, the risk of vocational reintegration failing is smallest by far in the **corridor of a 2 to 3-year family-related career break**. It is remarkable to note that there is no statistically significant relationship between dropping out of the return to work and the number of children: the question of whether a return to work succeeds or fails is not dependent on how many children under the age of 18 are (still) in the household.

The women who give up their job again after returning to work have not resigned definitively, but try again some time later. However, they are left with the painful experience of not having made it, of having overtaxed themselves, of having been overtaxed by other people – and that has a marked influence on the renewed return.

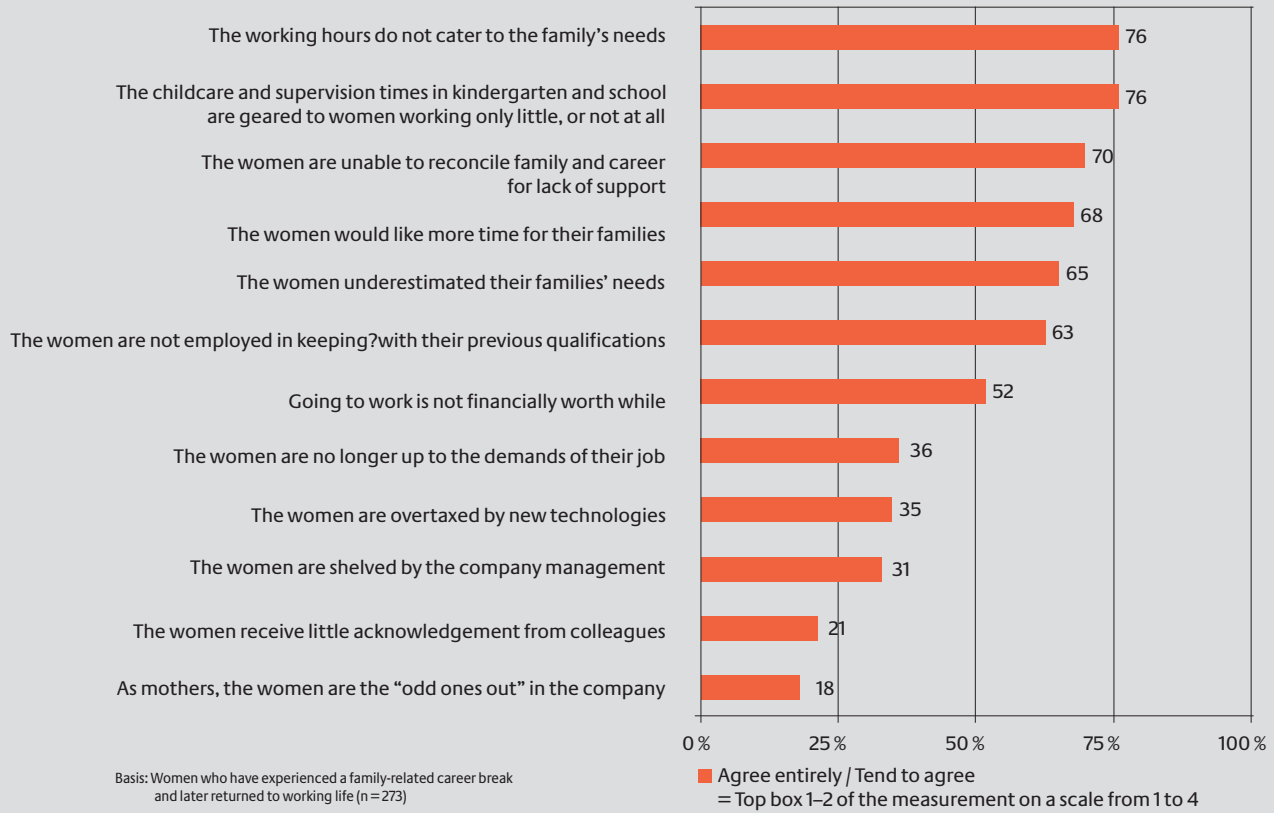
The above graph can also be read the other way round: the majority of the women returning to work do not fail, but remain on the labour market. That is an encouraging message for those women who are hesitant when it comes to the question of returning to work.

Sum of individual factors leads to dropping out of the return to work

A host of cumulative aspects come into play as regards the possibility of dropping out of the return to work. The difficulty of reconciling family and career is of special importance in this context.

- 76% of the women are of the opinion that women give up their job again because the working hours do not cater to the needs of the family.
- And an equally high percentage of the women complain about the childcare and supervision times in kindergarten and school, which give no consideration to working mothers.

Women's most important motives for dropping out of the labour market



X.

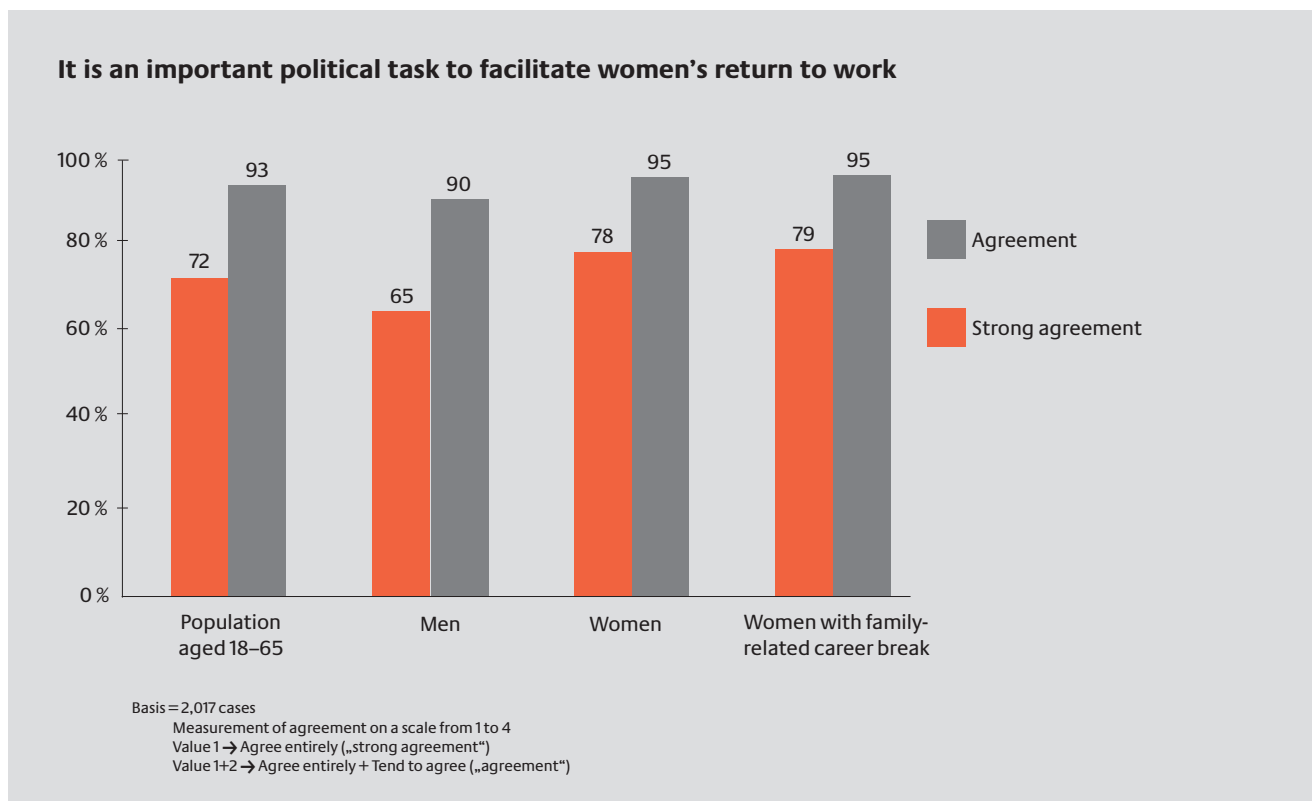
Appeal of women and men to politicians to facilitate the return to work

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An overwhelming majority of the population agrees that it is an important political task to facilitate women's return to work: 93% in total (90% of men, 95% of women).



Votes of this kind can be interpreted as the stereotypical passing-on of responsibility for any and all social problems to the political community. However, in contrast to other social topics, there is a large “hard core” of people who emphatically see politicians as being responsible for creating structural framework conditions and promoting a cultural climate.

Men accept and acknowledge women's wishes to go to work, and they see the structural difficulties that women (and also they themselves as involved partners) have to contend with. A return to work is also a question of determination and commitment – but without the necessary framework conditions, it involves unnecessary obstacles and is often a risk.

XI.

Appendix

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Method description

The present report is based on the findings of two studies conducted by Sinus Sociovision on behalf of the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ):

- A.** A basic study by the BMFSFJ on equality in Germany, entitled “Wege zur Gleichstellung heute und morgen. Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Untersuchung vor dem Hintergrund der Sinus-Milieus® 2007” (Ways to Equality Today and Tomorrow. A Social Science Study Against the Backdrop of the Sinus-Milieus® 2007). The population is the German-speaking resident population aged 18 years and over in private households. Qualitative and quantitative study methods were used to cover the topic holistically and sufficiently:

Qualitative-representative:

- | 20 creative group workshops, 10 with men and 10 with women from all milieus (homogeneous in terms of gender and milieu, 8 to 10 persons in each). The workshops were held in test studios in various towns in Eastern and Western Germany and each lasted 3 hours.
- | 40 narrative individual interviews with typical representatives from all milieus, half men and half women, each lasting 2 hours. The interviews were held in the private homes of the respondents, focused on the same topics as the creative group workshops and additionally included a biographical part to document the subjective reconstruction and assessment of the respondents' own lives – differentiated according to the men's and women's viewpoint.

The qualitative data were analysed using methods of social science hermeneutics.

Quantitative-representative:

- | 3,000 interviews, representative of the population. The population is the German-speaking resident population aged 18 years and over in private households. The representative sample was taken nationwide using the ADM Master Sample. The survey was performed by trained interviewers in the private homes of the respondents, using a standardised questionnaire. The data were subsequently analysed with the help of various statistical methods (frequency tables; statistical correlations; multivariate analyses via factor, correspondence and cluster analyses, as well as linear and non-linear regression analyses, etc.).

B. In addition, Sinus Sociovision conducted a representative supplementary survey on the subject of “Beruflicher Wiedereinstieg nach einer familienbedingten Erwerbsunterbrechung” (Vocational Reintegration Following a Family-Related Career Break) on behalf of the BMFSFJ in February 2008.

| 2,017 interviews, representative of the population. The population is the resident population aged between 18 and 65 years in private households. The sample was taken nationwide using the ADM Master Sample. The survey was conducted by telephone (CATI), using a standardised questionnaire.

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