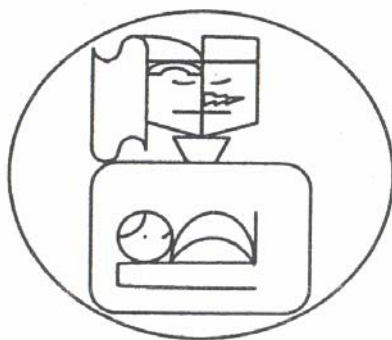


T.I.R.



Two Images in Re-construction: Paternity and Maternity
Overcoming Gender Stereotypes and Promoting Gender Equality

Responsible Paternity

White Paper

April 2006



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The information of the present document does not necessarily reflect the opinion or the point of view of the European Commission.



FAI- ACLI International Federation, Belgium- is the proponent of TIR project, as well as the supervisor of every of the activities, including dissemination and sensitisation campaigns.

FAI is directly involved in developing trans-national partnerships, and in creating and strengthening international third sector networks.



ACLI- Christian Associations of Italian Workers- are an association of social promotion capillary diffused on the entire national territory, from the great cities to the small centres. ACLI develop social, cultural, political, informative, training, and recreational initiatives, in order to animate the life of the local communities, with the objective of sensitising to the "active citizenship" and diffusing the participation to the public life.



IREF- Educational and Training Research Institute, Italy- is the coordinator of TIR project.

This institute mainly works on the following topics: family and gender equality; labour market; welfare reforms; active citizenship and voluntary organizations, etc. IREF's research style is characterized by a deep combination of quantitative and qualitative methods: this two-fold approach is employed in order to grasp the dynamic evolution of complex social processes.



ČSŽ– ČESKÝ SVAZ ŽEN, Czech Republic- is a NGO with a long-term experience that focuses its attention on diverse problems regarding women's position in society, as well as their active involvement in dealing with a wide range of social issues. At present, ČSŽ focuses its interests on balancing professional and family life. It is also experienced in organising sociological researches, different panels and round tables. At the national level, it is responsible for research, dissemination and sensitisation activities.



ITW- International training Centre for Women, Netherlands- is an International Foundation specialised in Training Management and Entrepreneurship for women. In the TIR project, it is responsible for research, dissemination and sensitisation activities, at the national level.



KVINNOFORUM - Foundation of Women's Forum, Sweden - has, since its inception, developed untraditional forefront methods and paradigmatic approaches to development, and development practice. Kvinnoforum makes efficient use of diverse expertises, human resources, and community involvement. This is carried out within a framework based on an intrinsic gender perspective. At the national level it was responsible for research, dissemination and sensitisation activities.



FAMILY AND CHILD CARE CENTER

FCCC - Family and Child Care Centre, Greece - is a Non-Governmental Organization whose main aim is the support of the family through the altering of integrated social services, the local development of under-privileged areas and the support of individuals threatened by social exclusion.

At the national level, it is responsible for research, dissemination and sensitisation activities of TIR project.

The present White Paper has been elaborated and written by Cristiano Caltabiano and Angela Schito. The WPRP has been developed considering the feedbacks and insights made by experts and researchers involved in the T.I.R. project. The authors wish to thank them for their fundamental contribution.

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Introduction

The White Paper on Responsible Paternity (WPRP) is one of the most significant outcomes of the T.I.R. project, aiming at fostering the debate on gender stereotypes and parenting. The experience and knowledge accumulated in qualitative and quantitative research, together with consultation processes and dissemination actions, are the backbones of the WPRP. Indeed the findings, feedbacks and information collected over more than 15 months of research-action have been extremely important in developing principles and proposals on responsible paternity.

Therefore the WPRP has a pragmatic objective: to suggest positive and constructive measures addressed to local, national and European policy maker (but also to communication and juridical experts, family and gender associations and trade unions) in order to exchange and use best practices that overcome cultural prejudices and gender stereotypes.

This policy paper, following a straightforward framework, will indicate item by item some principles and proposals that are believed to be fundamental to overcome these stereotypes and to promote a new image of women through politics for men. The White Paper intends to reach this aim following four steps:

- individuation of potential benefits, for both men and women, by activating a remarkable change in gender relations and by overcoming sexual segregated roles and female/male stereotypes;
- identification of good practices regarding the promotion of equality between sexes and the transformation of stereotyped images of men and women;
- elaboration of principles and proposals addressed to decision makers, based on the experience and outcomes capitalized during the project, in order to offer valuable indications for possible interventions;
- development of alternative strategies (to already existing laws on paternal and parental leaves or to economical incentives) able to overcome gender stereotypes.

The present WPRP is divided into 6 paragraphs. The first section (1.1 – 1.11) will describe the four basic assumptions on which the T.I.R. project is based. Then, in section 2 and 3 the principal findings that emerged from the comparative report will be described, by way of a critical analysis, focusing on fathers' experiences and on parenting within society (in particular strengths and weaknesses of the legislation and mass media will be analyzed). In the 4th section, some already existing good practices at the European level will be described, in order to promote a more active role for the fathers (4.1 – 4.5). Finally in the last two sections, some key principles (5.1 – 5.6) and innovative proposals addressed to the policy makers (6.1 – 6.5) will be proposed, in order to promote a shared responsibility between fathers and mothers .

1. WPRP rationale: four basic assumptions

1.1 During the last decade, the objective of gender equality has acquired consensus in the European public opinion, becoming an outstanding challenge for policy makers. Today, no one would explicitly disagree with the popular perception that women and men *should have* the same opportunities in their life; or, putting it in more evocative terms, that every effort should be made to break the *glass ceiling* in work, politics, community, family and so forth. Thus, gender equality has become a key word in the “European” lexicon.

1.2 Unfortunately, the distance between “politically correct” statements and reality is broad; women’s presence in the apical positions of the labour market is still scanty, and the situation is even worse in politics: notwithstanding national differences, women remain a small minority within parliaments and governments in every European country, both on a national and local level. Furthermore, things do not get better when we look at the private sphere: household activities (food preparation, dish washing, cleaning, laundry, childcare, etc.) are for the most part carried out by females. Data recently published by Eurostat show that, from this point of view, there is still a deep “gender divide”: on average, women aged 20 to 74 spend twice the time (4:23 minutes per day) than men (2:09) doing domestic work; the difference is particularly strong in Italy and Spain, while it is less severe in Sweden and Norway¹.

1.3 We have therefore a structural imbalance in society: women work more (especially when they are active both in the labour market and in the household), whilst they earn less (in symbolic as well as in material terms). Facts and figures show that something has gone wrong with equal opportunities; or perhaps, more likely, the claim for major representation of women in the public sphere *is only the visible side of the problem*. Indeed, the statistical proportion of women and men in political decision-making (or in the board rooms of companies) is a result of gender relation in society. In other words, the persistent gender gap is a by-product of social and cultural dynamics: *customs and social representation, which act on an informal level, still hinder women’s participation in society*.

1.4 This point was clearly made by the EU Commission in the Community Framework Strategy on Gender Relation (2001-2005), where it was stated that one of the most important tasks is “to promote change of gender roles and stereotypes”. Hence, the European Union is gradually moving from the traditional logic of women’s quota/rights to a wider vision of gender policy. A vision that needs to address everyday life, and the subtle forms of discrimination, which obstruct women’s emancipation.

1.5 This is a very complex task: it is not easy to manage socio-cultural dynamics in order to obtain a systemic (societal) transformation in gender practices. Policy must

¹ See Eurostat, *How is the Time of Women and Men Distributed in Europe*, Statistics in Focus, Population and Social Conditions, 4/2006. The data sources used by Eurostat are National Time Use Surveys carried out in the following European countries during diverse years: Belgium, Germany, Estonia, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Finland, Sweden, United Kingdom, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, and Romania. Denmark, Netherlands and Romania are not included in the average domestic work ranking, because data were not comparable in these countries.

deal with culture, a dimension that is by definition intangible: concealed attitudes and behaviours that reinforce gender stereotypes and segregated relation between men and women. Hence, in order to be effective (actually change gender disparities), policy making needs to accumulate accurate knowledge on a fundamental issue: how disparity between men and women is produced in our societies? This goes far beyond the generic agreement on equal opportunities. That is to say: how cultural mechanisms work inside the “social fabric”: at home, at work, during time off, and when women and men interact? The problem is that between women’s claims and women’s real condition there is an invisible barrier: this hidden dimension is created by culture.

1.6 Therefore *exploring (and acting on) culture in gender relations* has been one of the four basic assumption of the T.I.R. project. In this light, the first step has been to define culture focusing on both *symbolic meanings* and *attitudes/behaviours* displayed by women and men in everyday life. In more accurate terms, the specific cultural dimensions addressed by the project have been: *social representation (values, stereotypes, shared opinions, etc.)* and *relationship (gender interaction) through which the paternity/maternity images are established in the family and in society.*

1.7 The second assumption has been to *analyze paternity/maternity stereotypes and behaviours in reciprocal terms.* In western societies we are witnessing a gradual (ambivalent) democratization of the family; a process that is transforming the parental role: albeit the reproduction of habits and conventions, behaviour and attitudes of fathers and mothers are currently *negotiated continuously* in family dynamics. Hence, paternity and maternity are growingly interdependent in their current evolution (the evocative logo of the T.I.R summarizes well this process): this because women and men are forced to *reinvent* (discuss) constantly their relationship, not only in family settings; in particular, they experience mutual conflicts and adaptations, due to the difficult art of raising children, especially in double-income or in single-parent families. Thus fathers and mothers are intertwined while they perform their roles.

1.8 The third assumption points directly to the close link between what happens inside the family and outside in society. Here there is a need to observe (and act upon) *gender relations both in the private and public sphere.* Let us take a well-known example to understand this osmotic process: the battle to conciliate family and career. Dual-income families are facing difficulties in balancing domestic life with the work agenda; this pressure comes from a shift in post-industrial societies: although there are obstacles, women are moving rapidly in the professional arena. This emancipation is changing the roles within the family: who will shoulder the responsibility of raising the children if women work fulltime? Is the role of the housewife fading away? One can always appeal to a more collaborative and symmetric relationship between men and women, asking the first to change their habits; but the plain fact is that the number of double-income families is increasing everywhere and the consequence is that there is a need to substitute the traditional nuclear family structure with its gendered division of labour with new role models. This therefore creates new demands on policy makers that must address the demand for: more day care, more assistance for elderly relatives, and flexibility in the working environment. When we talk about gender topics, we are forced to consider the constant feedback from the public and the private domains of society.

1.9 The last assumption is probably the most demanding one: *focusing on men in order to promote changes in gender (unbalanced) relations*. In gender mainstreaming strategy there is an inclination to make the “female condition” the focal point of the question. This approach is reasonable: who can deny, even today, that women work *more* (when they are active both in the family and on the job), investing even *more* in education and training, whereas they achieve *less* in terms of social status? In this light, focusing on women’s condition has been a way to reveal disparities (injustice) between the sexes. This way of looking at things remains certainly valid even today, especially if we consider that the “glass ceilings” are still very thick all across Europe. But little attention is devoted to the “male condition”. Policy actions, cultural debates and empirical studies seem in part to ignore men; this absence of awareness has a negative impact on gender change: male experience is a fundamental factor in order to understand and change crystallized inequalities between the sexes. Moreover, another reason to look at men is that the masculine image (breadwinner or patriarch) is changing, leaving space for new male representations². This adjustment is taking place both in public realm (media, workplace, politics) and in the daily life of individuals. But, up to now, we have had very little information on this socio-cultural shift. From the beginning one of the T.I.R. project’s objective has been to focus on filling this gap of knowledge (and of cultural action) on the male-condition and has attempted to make an in-depth exploration into the social texture of society in order to grasp (and promote) the emerging “character” of a new male figure that could perform a responsible paternity.

1.10 Thus laying the groundwork with these four basic assumptions, Researchers, fathers, key-informants and experts have spent their time discussing (and observing) fatherhood, as well as gender relations within the family and in society. The experience and knowledge accumulated in qualitative and quantitative research³, together with consultation processes and dissemination actions, are the backbone of the WPRP. Indeed the findings, feedbacks and information collected over more than 15 months of research-action have been extremely important in developing principles and proposals on responsible paternity. Without knowledge there is no awareness, and no reasonable policy proposition.

1.11 The White Paper on Responsible Paternity (WPRP) is one of the most significant outcomes of the T.I.R. project and the aim of the present document is to foster the debate on gender stereotypes and relations. In the next sections of the paper we will progressively analyze the implications and challenges that lie behind responsible paternity: first of all, we need to learn directly from father’s experience (2); then we will look at how society (mass media and legislative institutions) deals with maternity and paternity (3), and will also individuate the best practices already

² How do men deal with these social changes? Is he able to surrender his “patriarchal” power that his economic position has privileged him with inside the family since he is no longer the sole breadwinner? Will he take on the responsibility of childcare and household tasks that have been traditionally considered women’s work? How does this new balance of power and exchangeable parenting roles affect the dominant cultural ideology?

³ A Comparative Report discusses the findings of both qualitative and quantitative research carried out in the five countries involved in the project (Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Netherlands and Sweden). Before the comparative report, a national report has been prepared and disseminated in each of the mentioned countries. In order to obtain these reports, contact: cristina.morga@acli.it.

developed in European countries (4); finally, in the last two sections, we will elaborate some proposals: introducing some principles that could foster ways to share responsibility in parenthood (5); and then discussing some measures that could support women and men in their parenting efforts (6).

2. Learning from father's experience (research findings at the individual level)

2.1 Throughout the execution of the T.I.R. project there were many opportunities to meet men/fathers, listen to their opinions and/or watch them interact with their families. Indeed we can learn many things from their discourses and behaviours. A starting point is certainly the permanence of gender stereotypes in the adult male populations. This evidence emerges from the trans-national survey conducted in Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Netherlands and Sweden⁴. Two general figures are particularly revealing: more than two thirds of respondents (68,3%) think that the mother *must* take care of the children when she doesn't work; at the same time, almost half of the sample (46%) believes that there is no need for any agreement with the partner before having a child, because everything will work out naturally afterwards⁵.

2.2 Considering these findings, one could conclude that men have a limited sense of fatherhood. First of all, because they seem to retain the cliché that women are the "angel of the household": and even if the woman works she is, *first of all*, a mother; and therefore the person in charge of the child. Second, because men do not plan anything before the baby is born: no need to negotiate about household task, childcare or education; the father "becomes a father" only after childbirth or, probably, much later. This is indeed a traditional way of conceiving paternity, something we would not expect to find today in a world where psychologists recommend an early involvement of the father (especially during the partner's pregnancy), as a key-factor for children's and parental well being.

2.3 Clearly, this is only one part of the story; until now, we have merely been examining social representations: opinion, values and attitudes. These are the building blocks through which common sense is elaborated, attaching a meaning to reality. But social representations are also *acted* in daily life, being modified by concrete experience. Therefore, we need to look closer into the father's ordinary behaviour. In this light, the T.I.R. project offers a full range of interesting insights on how the paternal experience is developing.

2.4 Direct observation is a useful research technique in order to understand how fathers behave within the family. T.I.R. research staff spent a great deal of time analyzing the parental role dynamics within 15 families, after obtaining their informed consent. Notwithstanding social and cultural differences among these households, a

⁴ During this survey we collected 5020 interviews with men aged from 18 to 80 years. This is the total amount of the probabilistic sample in the five countries mentioned. For a detailed description of sampling techniques used in the research see the comparative report of the T.I.R. project.

⁵ Obviously these two statistical trends vary across the five countries; at the same time, opinions are influenced (among other variables) by respondent's age and level of education. For instance, the percentage of agreement with the two stereotypes mentioned tends to decline among younger and better-educated respondents.

general pattern emerged with great evidence: daily routine and interaction involving fathers and mothers seem to be undergoing a complex process of transformation. There seems to be a swing away from old parenting habits to a new housekeeping and childcare styles. Families also appear to be characterized by the children's needs, and this determines the pace of the family activities, and affects the domestic balance.

2.5 Within the family setting, the man seems to play his role of father (and of partner) in a more innovative way compared to the past: sometimes he adapts himself in order to respond to other family members' needs (for example having the responsibility of playing with his children), although this is always subordinated to his work commitments. Whilst, the mother – even when she's employed outside of the home - continues to be the main caretaker of the household: she prepares, gets things done, coordinates, manages, and gives guidelines; briefly, she *directs the family scene*.

2.6 Although fathers and mothers continue to perform different roles, they are progressively abandoning traditional conventions. Albeit national differences, nowadays men and women don't look (and act) anymore like the breadwinner and housewife. But they are still searching for new forms of mutual adjustment in childcare and domestic activities. This transition is problematic and in the effort to restore a real balance between duties and responsibilities tension may be created within the couple. In many cases the problem is a lack of communication that can bring forth open conflict or – worse – separation between the two partners.

2.7 The problem of tension did not only rise from scarce communication or because fathers were “absent” caregivers, but also from a lack of space to perform an effective fatherhood. This aspect emerged from the in-depth interviews with a panel of 53 fathers. These men complained about the mother interfering with their relationship with the children; often, they feel excluded from the parenting function, because the partner did not give them the opportunity to establish their own fatherhood style. Fathers want space and freedom to be free to make their own mistakes, like in a trial-error experiment.

2.8 This finding partly confirms evidence collected during family observations: the mother directs the “household scene”, adopting frequently subtle strategies in order to control the father's behaviour. But – as some respondents pointed out – this is also due to the fact that fathers do not make much effort to play an active role in childcare. Probably this happens for one reason widely reported by men during in-depth interviews: they are currently experiencing fatherhood at an individual (emotional) level. This kind of involvement doesn't contribute to change crystallized roles, because it doesn't encourage reciprocity, awareness rising, and reflexivity within the couple.

2.9 Hence men (fathers) and women (mothers) still haven't reached a new balance because they are experiencing constant changes in their reciprocal roles inside the family. Crystallized practices are always present in household settings,

whereas tensions due to role redefinition are evident. As far as paternity is concerned, the impression is that men haven't yet re-elaborated their own "character" in care giving; and that women are still not able to help them in this identification process. Let us now turn to society to see if we can find other elements to make a better diagnosis on fatherhood.

3. Widening the perspective: research findings on paternity within society

3.1 In order to widen the perspective on paternity experience, we need to examine how media and political/judicial institutions deal with it. From this point of view, it is important to begin with gender stereotypes reproduction within society. Indeed, television and newspapers play a major part in making sense of this process. Generally speaking, fathers are portrayed as present, but not as much as mothers, in diverse media contents and formats. Nevertheless, in some news contexts (institutional, mundane or job-related) the father's presence is more tangible and it gives a glimpse of his role in the domestic context. On the contrary, in other contexts, especially those linked to the day to day life, his presence is less evident, frequently omitted, especially when the family issues reveals tragic aspects. At a deeper level, the fathers' image in the media still keeps some uncertain traits. In every case, the media tend to underline the "playful" or "heroic" aspects of the father, which risks making him appear unrealistic and not really involved in the familial sphere. The mothers, instead, are given ampler space in the media, but this does not automatically imply an adequate representation: very often their image is dramatized both in newspapers and in television.

3.2 This first portrait can be better specified looking at the news media contents. In general magazines, and particularly those targeted toward children and men, do not give much space to subjects involving paternity and/or maternity. However, the rare evidence allow a common line of analysis: 1) a celebrity-type father image is very diffused, as a self confident and affectionate winner; this "father icon" doesn't have much to do with daily household chores but appears in most newspapers as a modern hero; 2) the mother is often represented as the one caught up in family issues, and therefore, the main caregiver; 3) in domestic tragedies the father is often invisible, while the mother is "the protagonist of the drama"; in these situations, the motherly figure is portrayed as an irreplaceable presence in the children's adolescence; 4) frequently, the successful careerist father, promises to keep a "closeness pact" with his family, after a past mainly characterized by errors or emotional detachment.

3.3 The news media seem to make a different contextualization for fathers and mothers. On the one hand the father is usually external to the family and often seen acting within working or political contexts: where fatherly figure, being suffused with a celebrity aura, seems to become more significant and noteworthy. On the other hand the mother has a strong emotional charge, this figure is very often displayed within the household, being a symbol of the family relationships that copes with stressful life events.

3.4 In television advertising, the mother/woman is mainly represented as the principal caregiver, although the man/father tends to approach the domestic space and family

care. Furthermore, it is clear a progressive shift of the two parental figures has been triggered by new habits of consumers. Advertising messages involve fathers now, more than in the past, in household duties or spending free time with children, but their characterization, apparently positive, show glimpses of “unsuitableness”. Although he appears as part of the family unit, everything is nicer and funnier than in reality; the father figure is not strong in these virtual scenes because it is “diluted” (without a great expressive power). Undoubtedly, the most solid characterization of the father figure is that of the “breadwinner”, his material dimension inside the family unit. His ability to look after the family’s economic security and, at the same time, to transmit these meanings and practices to his offspring. On the contrary, in most ads mothers have a pragmatic connotation related to family issues: they cook, wash, do shopping and attend to household tasks. Even when they are represented as innovative agents (for instance using technological products), they still maintain the same domestic cliché.

3.5 In a majority of movies, television programs and talk shows, fathers – considered as a character embedded within a tale – seem to follow a similar path: a route that leads them from the start (defined by some “events”), to an intermediate situation (events convert), to a final solution where events settle. The starting situation generally sees the “detachment” between the male parental figure and the rest of the family – i.e. fathers leave the family unit after the separation/divorce with the children been assigned to the mother. Sometimes this detachment seems to be emotional rather than just physical. As the tale goes on, the intermediate situation is generally characterized by an important event, which somehow breaks with the past and brings a new balance. This prepares the final situation, when the family is reunited. At this stage two potential developments generally have taken place: either the father does something unexpected and brave, acting as a hero; or he is “redeemed” by the children willing to take him back in the family. The mothers, on the other hand, follow a more linear path. Their stories do not depict the “parable of the emotional reunion”, as they are usually the ones that nurture, either because they have custody or because they have chosen to give up their dreams and careers and stay home. Similarly to the news media, their figures are often dramatized; they are women who fight against illness, stress and daily problems; they fight every day to reaffirm their space, but they never lose touch with their children.

3.6 Media analysis shows that television and the press contribute to reinforce gender stereotypes, maintaining a clear distinction between father’s and mother’s image: the first are depicted more as breadwinners, while they appear almost “lost” or uncertain in family settings; the second are represented as pragmatic and self-confident caregivers, usually facing dramatic situations. Nevertheless, it is also possible to find out some positive elements in the media: in some isolated cases, fathers have been seen as involved figures in childcare, where work and family complement each other.

3.7 As far as the political/juridical level is concerned, it is important to underline that during the last decades gender equality has been strongly developed within European countries⁶: international agreements and conventions, together with EU regulations, have introduced relevant laws, guidelines and positive actions in the field of equal opportunities, and have also addressed the paternity/maternity topic. These kinds of regulations have been adopted in many member states. Furthermore,

⁶ For a comprehensive analysis about this topic see the T.I.R Comparative Report (chapter five).

numerous national and local governments have begun to apply the “gender mainstreaming” principle. Nevertheless, laws and rights need always to be implemented in order to be effective. There is always a void between the formal and substantial situation; and this is the case for gender equality and paternity/maternity legislations. In particular, two issues emerge with evidence.

3.8. First the difficult application of paternity leave legislation. There are obviously many differences in how this leave has been regulated in each country, but one common problem is emerging: men (fathers) who take the paternity (or parental) leave are not enough⁷. Two reasons explain their reluctance to have access to this right: 1) the parental/paternity leave puts a strain on the family budget, given wage disparities between working fathers and mothers: the former usually earn more than the latter; therefore this factor would clearly discourage men from taking it; 2) social prejudices. In the contemporary society the father is seen as the breadwinner, and the workplace is probably the place where this stereotype is stronger: in many circumstances, colleagues and employers may perceive the fathers as uncommitted to their job, and will not encourage a man that leaves work temporarily to get involved in childcare or in supporting his partner. Thus the paternal/paternity leave diffusion is being reduced by these prejudices that act like a stigma against the caring father. Until it is not acknowledged that men have equivalent responsibility for childcare, it is unlikely that most men will feel comfortable structuring their commitment to work in a manner that allows more family involvement.

3.9 Second, problems rise considering juridical court intervention during separations of the parental couple: there is a tendency to give custody of the child to the mother; and to privilege her wishes if there is controversy, although the equal parenthood principle is well established in legislations. One effect of this unbalanced situation is the father’s exclusion from childcare, with negative impacts on the children’s wellbeing as well as to any desire and aspiration a man may have towards fatherhood. Given this juridical disparity, it is difficult to encourage a joint parenting, and to overcome crystallized gender roles.

4. Exploring some best practices

4.1 The aim of the WPRP is to foster the debate on paternity/maternity, trying to improve the situation both in family dynamics and in the public sphere. We have looked at society’s weaknesses in overcoming gender stereotypes and in promoting a new vision of the experience of fatherhood; and now we need to examine best practices activated by NGO or local public administrations. Certainly, by analyzing these innovative experiences, some steps ahead can be made in order to develop a responsible paternity within society.

4.2 Obviously, the following best practices presentation is not exhaustive (it is clear that there are many other important best practices across Europe). The under-mentioned examples are only illustrative: i.e. we don’t intend to make a comprehensive analysis of successful approaches in the field of shared parenting;

⁷ Even in Sweden, where fathers take the parental leave more frequently (50% of entitled males for a period of two months), the level of male participation is under the standards fixed by the Swedish Government. Hence there are problems of applications even in countries like Sweden where parental leaves have been applied for a longer time, with more advantages for parents.

rather, in order to show how responsible paternity can be put into motion, it has been chosen to concentrate on four examples that address to two specific dimensions. a) the *cultural dimension* by sensitizing both parents and children; b) the *services dimension* in order to involve parents in child care agencies and to empower the couple before becoming parents.

4.3 A first virtuous example is “Active Fathers”, a European project that involves Italy, Belgium and Luxembourg. The project’s rationale is very simple: the consciousness that paternity leave is not used enough in Italy as well as in other European countries. Therefore, the main aim is to have an effective diffusion of information about the different kinds of parental leaves and a useful sensitization about these issues in society. According to “Active Fathers” proponents there is not only a lack of information, but also a cultural barrier that discourages fathers in taking paternity leave. The target of this best practice is encompassing: not only working fathers and mothers (both in the public and private sector), but also women and men who haven’t experienced parenthood yet. Three main strategies are adopted in the project: information/sensitization campaigns within private companies and public local institutions; involvement of trainers; cross-national exchanges in order to assess the development of paternity leave in each country.

4.4 Sensitization campaigns may not necessarily address parents but may also target children or youngsters. This is the case of Switzerland where a “Girls’ National Day” has been recently introduced. Daughters (and now sons) spend the day at the father’s or mother’s workplace. The aim is threefold: it gives girls the opportunity to get in touch with professional activities, even those that are usually reserved to men; it lets them familiarize with their parents’ life outside the household; and, more generally, it stimulates a national debate on roles that society attributes to both genders.

4.5 Best practices aren’t developed exclusively by sensitization strategies; another way to support change in gender relations and parenthood is to empower both fathers and mothers in childcare. This kind of activities has been promoted by NGOs: one example is represented by the Sheffield Children’s Centre (SCC), which is self financing and delivers a whole range of childcare services: before/after school care, holiday play schemes, early years education, family support provisions, therapeutic services, health services, training and education for adults, women’s aid support, consultancy, advocacy and community development support. The approach proposed by the Centre is effective for five reasons: 1) the co-operative format which enables parents to get involved in all the aspects of the childcare services, because they participate as funding members of the co-operative or as care workers; 2) profits are reinvested in services and/or in the local community; 3) equal opportunities, interculturalism and caring fatherhood are key strategies for SCC; 4) the Centre is one of Britain’s Early Excellence Centres and one of the Government’s designated Trailblazers; 5) organisations such as SCC have been a successful solution in Britain, where there can be found 22 other similar experiences, members of the common network (Co-operative Childcare).

4.6 Even local public bodies can activate best practices, like in the case of the Council for Family and Childhood Promotion, a Department within the Municipal Government in Rome, in Italy. It offers a course for young couples that are planning a

civil wedding with the aim to help them develop awareness on the dynamics that make up a conjugal relationship. The course help them to reflect (on an individual and couple level) about “being together” and about the “need to communicate”, using creative and participative methodologies, such as simulations and role-play. This initiative is free and characterized by meetings and laboratories for small groups. The main subjects are: conflict and mediation within the couple; the development of various skills involving bonding, listening and autonomy within the parental experience. The value-added of this best practice is the proactive strategy involving couples before having children. Briefly, this strategy should – in the promoter’s intentions - produce an “anticipatory awareness effect” among future parents.

5. The key-principles of the WPRP: toward shared responsibility

5.1 Nowadays fathers are experiencing the turmoil of accelerated change: as many scholars and experts continuously remind us, contemporary society is becoming more and more individualized – i.e. the building blocks of social life (political institutions, community, labour culture and organizations, and the same family) are weakening under the pressure of different epochal processes (first of all the globalization of markets and culture). Clearly, it is impossible here to make a diagnosis on the multiple crisis reverberating in late capitalist societies.

5.2 Rather, we need to focus on individual and familiar consequences of this scenario: what types of changes are fathers witnessing in an individualized society? And what about women who currently strive to juggle work and family? Obviously, there is no short answer to these questions. But, there is one concrete element that we should not forget: paraphrasing Beck’s famous analysis on risk society we can say that today “both fathers and mothers are forced to give biographical answers to systemic contradictions”. Therefore, today the longstanding experience of parenting is taking place in an ambivalent historical period: on the one hand, women and men are able to express themselves in a more autonomous way (style) within family settings; on the other hand they are facing numerous uncertainties in order to fulfill household tasks. And this for one reason: traditional family arrangements faded away while leaving father (and mothers) with the complex job to perform their roles without general norms on how to behave.

5.3 This argument becomes palpable if we consider the fundamental issue of a father’s responsibility – i.e. the bond that binds the father to his child, the mother and (generally speaking) to society. In pre-industrial society it was clear what this meant: the *pater familias* was the head of the numerous “peasant family”, acting as the ruler (patriarch) of a “community of destiny”, which was based on ascriptive roles and authority. With the coming-up of industrial society, adult males have moved definitely away from the household: they no longer have to manage (lead) the self-production based family; they have become breadwinners, working as blue or white collar in the marketplace. The father has partially vanished from the household: he has only prescriptive functions appearing only in relevant moments in his child’s life, making sermons on how his offspring ought to behave in broad terms; or taking paramount decisions for his or her future. The day to day care giving function has mostly fallen to the woman, which has become the “angel” of the household.

5.4 The point is that contemporary society doesn't look anymore like rural or industrial society. At the same time, ascriptive and prescriptive responsibility are no longer guiding principles for society as a whole. Albeit national differences, the nuclear (gender role separated) family is no more the typical household in all advanced society, being substituted by the two-income or single-parent family. Currently men and women need to re-negotiate family burdens and projects, since they are both employed in the labour market, or they are going through the difficult process of couple separation. Therefore, who (and how) will take care for the child becomes an open question within the parents' agenda. This social process is ambivalent: on the one side, there is an enrichment and democratization of family relationships; on the other, confusion and conflicts are widespread in families.

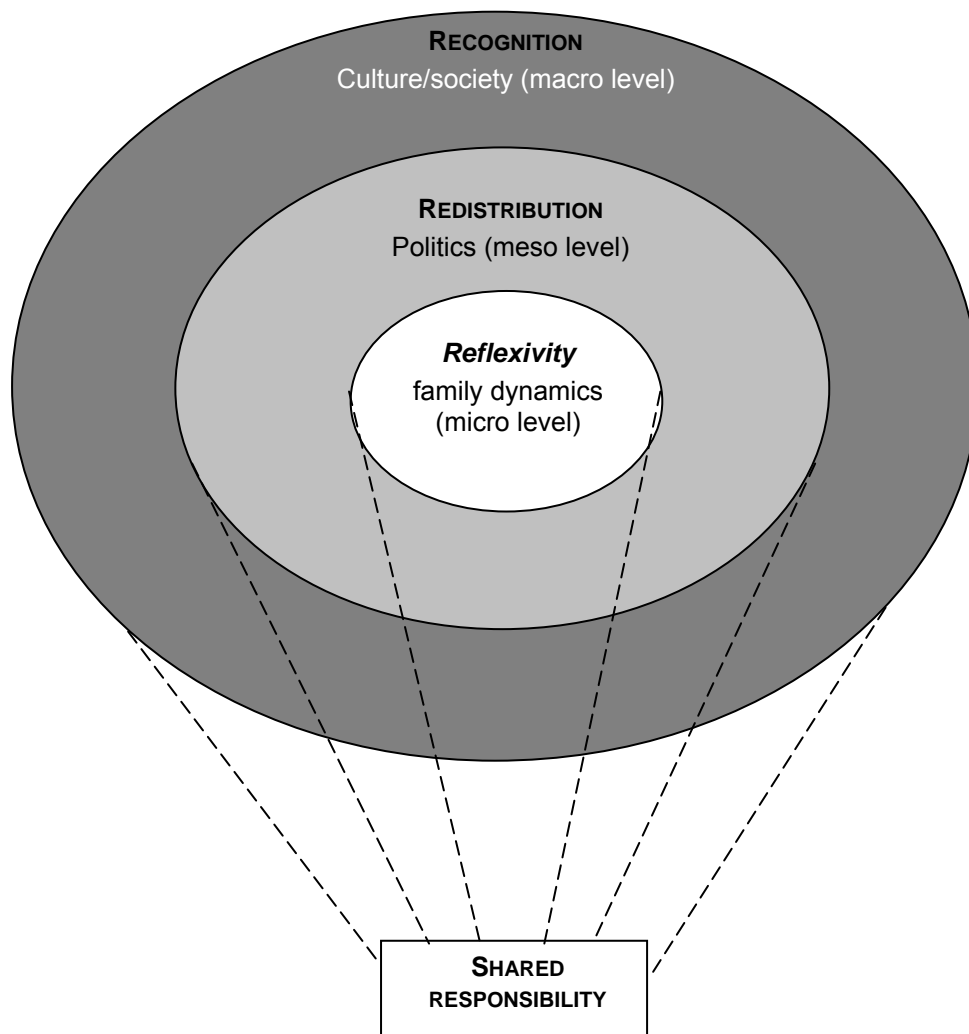
5.5 Thus, men and women are actually acting the parenthood roles without a clear definition of their responsibility: the bond that binds them to family and society is vague and/or incomplete; nevertheless some suggestions on how this tie could be rearranged are progressively emerging as we are entering in a novel social order. In order to enact a new sense of responsibility among fathers - with the benefit of mothers - one needs to combine three principles, each of which being linked to different levels of society:

- **reflexivity** (micro level - family dynamics). First of all, it is important to question crystallized gender role and practices within the couple and in child care, in order to build up a more collaborative parenthood (co-parenting); in this light, communication between men (fathers) and women (mothers) should be enhanced and encouraged; inside the family, decision making should be an informed, flexible and democratic process. The point is that equal involvement in childcare is hard to reach if there is no awareness and empowerment within the couple;
- **redistribution** of gender social positions in society (meso level - politics). Gender equality is indeed a cornerstone of the European agenda. Across all Member States no one would dare to argue against the *popular ethics* that men and women must have equal opportunities in all public life sectors. The problem is that women still face too many "glass ceilings" in their road toward social emancipation. We do not need to underline that these impediments have a negative impact on family and parenthood. In fact, in order to modify conventional (unequal) practices in the private sphere, you need to remove unbalances in the public sphere. For this reason politics is important, in particular the provision of welfare services, together with gender mainstreaming (positive actions) in every policy sector;
- **recognition** of a new male social identity (macro level – culture/society). This is the most problematic dimension to address since culture is the hidden dimension of society. Attitudes, stereotypes and values permeate the "social fabric" – i.e. every relationship between human being, in all social domains, is influenced by informal conventions and by our ability to make sense out of reality. In particular, until recently, there was a generalized agreement around what the male figure ought to be: he is the breadwinner, the one responsible for economical aspects of the family, a person who can measure success only in the public sphere. Nowadays things have changed, but across the world no image (social representation) has been able to substitute the breadwinner cliché. In this light, we need a cultural about-face in order to modify this stereotype; man needs to integrate the caregiver function within his worker identity. In provocative terms, men and also women need to reconstruct a new image: the *care winner* – i.e. a man/woman who thinks (and believes) that parenthood can fulfill his/her

personality, helping him/her to reach a balance between professional aspirations and paternity/maternity desires. Indeed, this is the major challenge in order to promote a new type of responsible parenthood.

5.6 Summarizing previous points, the new kind of responsibility we are looking for can be defined as shared responsibility: 1) a social tie based on an alliance between men (fathers) and women (mothers) within the family; 2) endorsed by a political commitment to foster equal opportunities between males and females in society, as well as an efficient welfare; 3) and the need to have a cultural about-face in regard to male's (and also female's) representation– an image which incorporates and equalizes both care giving and working functions. The only way to enforce shared responsibility is to intermingle the principles of reflexivity, redistribution and recognition. It is very simple: in order to encourage social change – and this is the case for gender roles and paternity – you need to connect within a common framework family dynamics, political strategies and cultural processes (fig. 1).

Fig 1- The road ahead: shared responsibility



6. Some proposals

6.1 According to T.I.R. project's main aims its now time to move toward the most "pragmatic" section of the WPRP, suggesting positive and constructive measures in the field of policy making; in particular, we need to focus on specific proposals that may promote a more conscious, intense and responsible paternity, in order to obtain an effective equality between women and men. Surely, we do not intend to set a comprehensive agenda on these issues; rather, the purpose is to give some input to an informed debate that needs to take place both at the European and national levels, involving policy makers and experts, as well as leaders of Fathers' and Mothers' Associations and of Organizations promoting gender equality.

6.2 It is useful to start from the classification already presented in the previous section: each proposal could be inscribed here into the three dimensions, which have been considered as the key principles to build a shared responsibility in family and society: *reflexivity*, *redistribution*; and *recognition*. Using this approach, it is possible to define three different lines of intervention that may have an impact on: micro level (family dynamics); meso level (politics); macro level (culture circulating in every institution and sphere of society).

6.3 The way to reflexivity: as already pointed out, reflexivity means the necessity to question gender roles and practices within the family, in order to increase cooperation between the parents in childcare and in other household activities. From this point of view, we need a twofold approach.

- 6.3.1 First it would be important to create new spaces (and places) where fathers and mothers and children can discuss, communicate and exchange experiences, in order to enrich their emotional and relational skills. In particular, it would be essential to:
 - ✓ introduce family topics in school educational programmes, in countries and region where they are not present: in this way, from early childhood, students can get in touch with a shared vision of daily family management, assimilating the value of integration between gender roles;
 - ✓ activate meeting and learning spaces (for parents and children) were to learn and use "emotional intelligence" (building up empathy, self-control, "care for others") and communication skills;
 - ✓ organize meeting places (for fathers and mothers) where "parenthood" can be discussed, in order to exchange the various experiences from different family contexts.
- 6.3.2 Second it would be also important to build up a more collaborative parenthood, before and after the birth of the children by:
 - ✓ increasing the quality of pre-natal preparation and childrearing training courses, making them more suitable to the couples needs, also rising awareness on the social implications of parenthood;
 - ✓ introducing an unprejudiced multi-disciplinary commission, which examines both sides of the couple: the mother's and the father's point of view and social conditions during the stressful experience of separation and divorce.

6.4 The way to redistribution: means the need to re-define the position of men and women within the society. In this case, the proposals are directly addressed to policy makers, at national and local level, considering also the European level. The aim is to enhance the involvement of fathers in household tasks and in childcare, overcoming gender discrimination (against men and women) in every sphere of public life sector. In fact, an interesting finding of the T.I.R. project is that often men/fathers feel excluded from family related caring activities. In this light, it would be interesting to suggest that children should be brought into their father's life, instead of only focusing on bringing fathers' into their children's life. In particular, redistribution may be implemented with three strategies.

-6.4.1 Acting in the workplace means:

- ✓ going beyond present boundaries that separate home and work. It would be useful to open workplaces to a new *special visitor* (children), in order to bring fathers and children back into each others lives;
- ✓ adopting a shorter workday; this would empower men, giving them the opportunity to combine work and family care activities, without fear of job termination or lost promotions;
- ✓ changing working conditions and regulations in order to enable men to have access by giving a higher value to care and educational professions (teachers, crèche employees, nursing, etc.);
- ✓ promoting "parenthood" as a positive value for worker's identity and in business culture; in particular male workers could be involved in their parental role, using a sensitisation strategy⁸;
- ✓ modifying work regulations in order to increase time and opportunities for family care (flexible work hours, parental leave, part-time work, family holidays, father training programs);
- ✓ improving parental leave legislation, by extending the age of the children during which fathers and mothers can take leave; in general fathers should have more equal opportunities, and commitment as well, to look after their children;
- ✓ introducing rewards for employers who adopt anti-gender discrimination and parent-friendly practices, like in Germany where the Government awards those companies that adopt a family friendly politics⁹.

- 6.4.2 Providing welfare services means:

- ✓ increasing family allowances, independently from the number of children;
- ✓ activating more day care, with pedagogic and caring personnel proportioned to the number of children;

⁸ This kind of approach has been adopted in Sweden with encouraging results. In particular, in the county of Stockholm a manifold strategy has been elaborated in order to explain the ten reasons why father should take paternity leave: 1) you are a normal and responsible man; 2) you have the legal right to stay at home; 3) you'll soon be back; 4) you're not irreplaceable; 5) you will get a balance in your life; 6) you will learn how to handle stress; 7) you will get free skills development; 8) you're gonna love your job (even more); 9) you become a master at improvising; 10) you will become the ultimate diplomat.

⁹ For instance, in 2005 the prize winners are: in the small-business category has been a steel and metal construction company that has 28 (mainly male) employees, [Anton Schoenberger Stahlbau und Modelltechnik](#). It is run by two sisters, Sabine and Andrea Schönberger, who extensively support their employees in reconciling family life and work. Workers can bring their children to work in the event of emergency or can work at home if necessary. For occasions such as a child's birthday or the first day of school, employees receive a day's paid leave. Prizes are also given to medium and big companies.

- ✓ activating public services for fathers (and also for mothers in countries where they do not yet exist): provisioning public facilities, such as baby changing rooms for fathers; creating safe houses for fathers and children (for male victims of domestic violence)¹⁰;
 - ✓ creating support systems (fair treatment) for fathers in crisis situations, such as false accusations brought against them, filing discrimination complaints, non-compliance of access agreements; also providing funding for anti-discrimination bureaus on behalf of fathers;
 - ✓ offering government funding for other father related activities.
- **6.4.3 Strengthening gender mainstreaming means:**
- ✓ setting up national/local Commissions with the function of studying the rules, regulations and laws concerning mothers, fathers and children, as well as provisions for family/work reconciliation. A report (Father Effect Report) should be published with the findings of these commissions, putting (among other things) emphasis on discrimination against fathers/men;
 - ✓ setting up an Emancipation Monitoring Committee (EMC) with the following functions: a) control that policy programs conceived for mothers and children will also be adapted for fathers (fathers should be considered when evaluating such programs); b) check that fathers are included in research on children and family life; c) verify that European, national and regional projects are developed with special attention for fathers;
 - ✓ encouraging divorced fathers' participation in schools and in other educational institutions;
 - ✓ establishing an official governmental department for fathers/men, following the Austrian example;
 - ✓ promoting a *gender budgeting strategy*, not only in local administration but also in companies, in order to analyse the impact of this politics on practical life of men and women. It would be also useful to learn from eventual errors and to implement new solutions;
 - ✓ proposing a set of minimum legal provisions (and policies) taken from the E.U. legislation that national governments shall be encouraged to adopt.

6.5 The way to recognition: at this level, the proposals should promote a new (and more balanced) social representation of men/fathers as well as of woman/mother. Especially the cultural industry¹¹ can play an essential role in rectifying gender stereotypes. This could be done in cooperation with the policy makers: politicians and media experts could work for a cultural program that is aimed at the empowerment of men in care giving and gender equality. This effort could be implemented through various measures:

- ✓ introducing a “watchdog” for readers and TV viewers in order to submit complaints about discriminatory written articles or programming. The public should use this tool to pressurize the media to change its biased broadcasting practices;
- ✓ setting up an advertisement code commission evaluating fathers and mothers stereotyped messages. The commission could give an important contribution in order to change the current images of fathers and mothers:

¹⁰ Male victims of domestic violence deserve protection just as their female counterparts do.

¹¹ Production and publishing houses, broadcasting and advertising companies.

- a) overcoming the media's most diffused portrayal of women as people who are able to nurture and raise children better;
- b) promoting a more positive (and realistic) image of man/father, going beyond stereotypes such as the "macho men", "the incapable father", "the mother-dependent father";
- c) questioning the male's monochromatic breadwinner image in order to integrate it with the one of the care giving father;
- ✓ arranging information campaigns focusing more on "cooperation", "strengthening of relations", "common responsibility" within the family;
- ✓ re-establishing a real distinction between public and commercial broadcasting service: public television should give more space to educational programs relating to family.

Conclusions

Further actions and provisions need to be added to the already existing legislation on parental and paternity leaves and to the economical measures in order to start up a process that will allow to set up a more equal society (with less gender stereotypes). The suggestions that are indicated in the White Paper on Responsible Paternity are only a first step of a more long term and complex design.

In order to elaborate innovative strategies it is necessary to start from four basic assumptions:

- 1) to explore (and act on) the culture in gender relations;
- 2) to analyse stereotypes and behaviours on paternity and maternity in reciprocal terms;
- 3) to observe the gender relations in the public and private sphere;
- 4) to focus on men in order to promote changes in gender relations.

it is also necessary to combine three principles in order to support a shared responsibility. Each of them is tightly intermingled to the different levels of the society.

- a) the principle of reflexivity (micro level – family dynamics)
- b) the principle of redistribution (meso level – politics)
- c) the principle of recognition (macro level – culture/society)

Some proposals have been elaborated, following these three principles:

- I) the way to reflexivity: a) to create new spaces (and places) where fathers, mothers and children have the opportunity to discuss, communicate and exchange experiences, in order to enrich their emotional and relational abilities;
- II) the way to redistribution: to act on the workplaces, to provide welfare services, to strengthen the gender mainstreaming;
- III) the way to recognition: to promote a new (and more balances) social representation of men/fathers and women/mothers.

Briefly, family dynamics, political strategies and cultural processes will be connected within a common framework. In this White Paper it has been tried to trace a route; now, it's the time for policy makers and experts to promote a shared parenthood within society.