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HIGHS AND LOWS IN IMPLEMENTING WORK-LIFE BALANCE AT COMPANIES IN THE BASQUE COUNTRY

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Abstract

This paper analyses the implementation of work-life balance measures by companies and discusses their links with certain business features (such as area of activity, company size and the proportion of female employees) using linear regression techniques. The results of a survey conducted on companies from various sectors based in the Basque Country highlight that it is businesses in the services sector and larger companies that tend to provide more work-life balance measures. In addition, there tend to be fewer work-life balance measures in female sectors. This may be related to the job insecurity of the women involved.

Keywords: work-life balance, gender, work-family policies, female sectors

1. Introduction

Gender inequalities exist in all regional contexts, though there has undeniably been a positive trend in some indicators in recent years. Inequalities and discrimination against women are found in almost all fields, and the economy is no exception. Furthermore, it could be argued that economic inequalities between women and men are the most persistent, apparently the hardest to eradicate, and closely related to labour inequalities. Economic and labour inequality is not found on the same scale everywhere, but a number of common features can be found in most contexts. Thus, the number of women in work

appears to be lower than that of men, their situation in the labour market tends in general to be more unstable, their wages are lower and jobs tend to be segregated by gender.

One of the issues that underlie economic inequalities between women and men is the unequal impact of family responsibilities on each group. Traces of the "classic division of labour" from the times when the prevailing gender roles more or less followed the "male-bread winner/housewife" model seem difficult to erase. Although women generally have jobs today, progress in the participation of men in the so-called reproductive tasks has been much slower and changes in the way in which society perceives the responsibilities allocated almost exclusively to women in this field are also changing only slowly. This means that problems connected to reconciling paid and non-paid work continue to be regarded as female problems.

Our starting assumption is that although greater sharing of responsibilities between men and women for unpaid work will not put an end to the economic gender inequalities it will have a positive impact on closing gender and pay gaps, and may also have an impact on the collective imaginary in favour of a more equitable sharing of the burden of work between the sexes. Thus, although there has been significant progress in policy and awareness in the field of work-life balance or co-responsibility, it is still clearly insufficient. More progress is needed in the distribution of work at home, in regulations and in the involvement of various actors to achieve greater co-responsibility.

The main goal of this paper is to analyse the relationship between the characteristics of companies and their implementation of work-life balance policies. In order to achieve an understanding of these relationships, we present a comprehensive review of the literature and study the implementation of work-life balance policies in private businesses in a region of Southern Europe (Gipuzkoa, Basque Country). The progress made in this field is real, but it is observed to have been made mainly in the public sector, with the issue remaining largely unresolved in the private sector. Hence, this paper seeks to contribute to the literature on the implementation of work-life balance measures in private businesses, giving new evidence to help understand the reality of the world of business. It also seeks to help public administrations to implement measures adapted to current circumstances that can be useful in furthering real equality between women and men by promoting a balance between work and family life in private companies.

The paper begins with a review of the literature and presents the main findings of some significant studies conducted to date on the implementation of work-life balance policies at companies in various countries and regions, taking into account the various institutional and organisational factors that affect them. Section Three summarises the latest developments in public work-life balance policies within the context studied, and Section Four details the study carried out on businesses in Gipuzkoa, explains the main results. Finally, Section Five discusses the conclusions reached.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE MEASURES AT BUSINESSES: INSTITUTIONAL AND ORGANISATIONAL ASPECTS

Any analysis of the implementation of work-life balance measures in companies and organisations must cover a very broad range of aspects, including the types of measure adopted most frequently, the factors that affect the implementation of such measures, their effects on the economic performance of organisations, the factors that determine the use

of existing measures by workers and the effects that this has on the quality of their lives (Gregory and Milner 2009). The main papers on these issues in the fields directly related to the empirical work conducted here are presented below.

In this case, we seek to understand the mechanisms and factors that predispose organisations to adopt work-life balance agreements (see Figure 1). Following the theoretical framework proposed by Laura den Dulk (2001), we distinguish between institutional conditions and organisational features. On the basis of this study of the initiatives of organisations in the field of work-life balance, the implementation of policies in this field can be seen as based on a complex interaction between the legislative context in each country, the economic situation, the characteristics of each company and negotiations between employers and trade unions on working conditions (Poelmans 2005).

Figure 1: Institutional and organisational factors affecting work-life balance measures at businesses

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Den Dulk, 2001:64.

2.1. Influence of institutional conditions in adopting work-life balance measures

The theory emphasises the influence of the legal and regulatory environment on the structure and practices of organisations. The relationship between an organisation's features and the implementation of work-life balance measures may vary due to the institutional context, which is determined by the role of governments, collective agreements, cultural values and ideology, and the situation in the labour market. Thus, governments, with their laws and regulations, directly affect how organisations operate. But in addition, mandatory policies also have an indirect effect due to the fact that laws create an environment that promotes expectations regarding how businesses should operate. Laws, therefore, exercise coercive pressure on organisations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, cited in Zucker, 1987).

Some studies point to the importance of social policies (or the lack thereof) in the collective awareness in the sense that legislation enables or legitimises what can be thought and done, while the State "speaks" through its laws and, in this regard, has symbolic efficacy (Gaba and Salvo, 2016). Policies based on incentives through subsidies or recommendations may also promote the implementation of work-life balance measures. Many papers have investigated the influence of government policies on organisations to implement paid and unpaid maternity leave or paid sick leave (for a review of them see Arthur and Cook, 2003: 233-243).

From a broader viewpoint, a paper by Den Dulk et al. (2012) investigates the relationships between welfare state regimes and the implementation of work-life policies by companies and comes up with some conclusions in this regard. In particular, it points out that in countries with social-democratic regimes, where public work-life balance policies are quite extensive, companies adopt work-life balance measures to a greater extent than in countries with liberal and conservative regimes, in which the level of public provision in these fields is minimal or inadequate. When there are public measures in this field companies, far from ignoring this issue, are more active. And when the implementation of work-life balance agreements is left to the market, as in liberal regimes, businesses do

not compensate for the absence of public policies. In these cases organisational factors, which are addressed later in this paper, have a greater impact.

In addition to governments, trade unions may also put pressure on employers to adopt work-life balance measures and to include them in collective agreements. The limits of this pressure vary depending on the strength of trade unions and the importance given to work-life balance issues. The paper by Wiß (2016) concludes that the existence of workers' representatives has a positive effect on implementing flexible working hours in the high-value services sector (financial sector) and in public administrations but a negative effect in manufacturing industry. This may be because in the predominantly-male manufacturing industry representatives act on behalf of men, among whom work-life balance is seen as an issue affecting women and not a priority issue for them. In contrast, in high-value services and in public administrations workers' representatives are in contact with more women employees, for whom work-life balance matters.

Studies indicate that the level of unionisation is positively linked to the number of work-life balance measures in the workplace and also to a lower likelihood of employees having to work long hours. The strength of trade unions is also associated positively with the recognition of work-life balance responsibilities by employers, although this does not always mean that employees perceive that their bosses understand their responsibilities outside work (Trade Union Congress, 2011).

The rules and values regarding the division of paid and unpaid labour between women and men or regarding women's participation in the labour force may also exert social pressure in support of work-life balance policies (Fernández-Lozano, 2018). Likewise, the cultural and structural aspects prevalent in organisations may be such that work-life balance measures are not extensively used or are only used by women. If the measures are fragmented and do not affect the organisational culture, they result in gender segregation (Gregory and Milner, 2009: 4).

According to Connell (2003), "gender order" is the historical construction of gender power relations, and that gender order institutionalises a "gender regime" that permeates institutions such as the welfare state and labour markets. A recent study in 13 European countries has revealed that public attitudes regarding gender equality at work and in personal life are consistent with welfare regimens. These attitudes have changed due to the recession that started in 2007, bringing about a return to more traditional views on gender (Guo and Gilbert, 2012).

The situation of the labour market is another factor that affects decisions by employers regarding the implementation of measures to facilitate the work-life balance of their employees. If unemployment is high, businesses have fewer incentives to draw up measures, given that it is easy to hire labour. It may also be that the working population are more concerned about merely having jobs than about the quality of those jobs. By contrast, if there is a shortage of labour then work-life balance agreements can attract and retain qualified personnel. This type of approach fits in with the resource dependence theory, which states that in the field of work-life balance companies adopt initiatives as a means of surviving in a changing environment. Thus, given a greater number of women in the workforce, companies react to ensure that they have skilled human resources. This framework has been applied in studies of the implementation of child-care and flexible work-time programmes by organisations. The conclusion is that organisations which are

more dependent on women and people with children are more sensitive to work-life balance policies (Goodstein, 1994).

2.2. Organisational and corporate features and work-life balance measures at businesses

The various studies focus on analysing the effects of the size of a business, the sector in which it operates, its ownership (public or private), the percentage of women employees and of female managers, the qualifications of the workforce, the presence and the interests of trade unions, the participation of workers in business process improvements, etc. Generally speaking, large companies tend to offer work-life balance agreements to a greater extent than small ones, public-sector companies more than private businesses and, within the private sector, those dedicated to financial services more than construction or industrial companies. The percentage of women and their status in the business hierarchy are also relevant to a certain extent (den Dulk, 2001).

Some papers state that large organisations respond better than small ones to institutional pressure regarding their involvement in work-life balance issues. According to the study by Ingram and Simmons (1995), which is framed in an institutional perspective, organisations seem to implement work-life balance initiatives to gain legitimacy. Large organisations apply work-life balance agreements more frequently because they are more open to public scrutiny, for example by the media. Adopting such agreements improves their brand image, which attracts customers and also ensures a supply of potential employees.

The paper by Tobias Wiß (2016) links the possibility of flexible working timetables and getting time off in Austria, Denmark, Italy and the United Kingdom with some characteristics of companies and employees. The larger the company the greater the chance of a flexible timetable but the less chance there is of getting time off. It is understood that this may happen because the employer/employee relationship is closer and more familiar in small businesses, which may lead to agreements that work well for both parties. In this line, other investigations (Chinchilla et al., 2006) find that micro-businesses (1 to 5 workers) could benefit from closeness to and accessibility of the management. This may facilitate the implementation of certain work-life balance measures, particularly those which are less costly.

One of the variables often linked to work-life balance policies being adopted at businesses is the presence of women both in the general workforce and among the management. Some investigations have found that the proportion of women employed is positively related to the implementation of work-life balance agreements (Goodstein, 1994); however, other studies conclude that although the proportion of women employed is relevant the findings are not conclusive (den Dulk, 2001).

In addition to their numbers, the positions held by women in an organisation also play an important role (Atkinson and Hall, 2009). In organisations with a relatively large number of female managers work-life balance agreements are found more often than in those with mainly low-skilled female employees (Ingram and Simmons, 1995). Therefore, the level of sensitivity to work-life balance issues rises as the proportion of female managers increases. It follows that women workers do not seem to have enough power to influence the implementation of work-life balance policies at companies, but female managers do seem to have that power. This is consistent with the results in Pasamar and Valle (2010)

regarding the increased perception of institutional pressure to adopt work-life balance agreements when the person in charge of human resources is a woman.

The paper by Adame, Caplliure and Miguel (Adame et al., 2016), conducted for Spanish SMEs, concludes that the presence of women in an organisation and the existence of a culture committed to work-life balance issues does not determine the level of implementation of work-life balance policies. However, the absence of these factors does result in the limited development and deployment of said policies. If there are no women in the managerial positions that decide whether to implement such measures, they are even less likely to be implemented.

When considering the presence of women and the sector of operation, recent papers indicate that in highly predominantly-male businesses and sectors, there is a lack of work-life balance measures. The explanation given for this focuses on the consideration that work-life balance issues do not pertain to men (Belope-Nguema et al.; 2018, Meil et al., 2019). According to Wiß (2016), if the supervisor is a woman the use of flexible working hours only increases in the case of manufacturing industries. This could be explained because when women occupy managerial positions in predominantly-male sectors they improve work-life balance opportunities as they are more aware of the needs of mothers and fathers. In the retail trade and accommodation and food service sectors the opposite is the case, which could be because in these sectors women usually occupy junior rather than senior managerial positions and thus have less power over work-life balance policies. Along the same lines, it has also been found that in fields with predominantly female employees, such as home-care businesses, there is a low incidence of policies that favour equality and work-life balance. This may be because of the job insecurity that is typical of this activity (Carrasquer et al., 2015). The study by Chinchilla et al. (2006) examines the influence of fixed-term jobs on the existence of family-responsibility policies and finds an inverse relationship between the proportion of fixed-term workers and the main work-life balance policies. Thus, job instability, in this case in the form of fixed-term contracts, could be a factor that limits work-life balance measures.

3. PROMOTING WORK-LIFE BALANCE MEASURES: A CHALLENGE IN MANAGING PUBLIC POLICIES

Given the multilevel governance of subregional European territories, efforts to understand the context of the public policies that regulate and promote the implementation of work-life balance measures in Gipuzkoa need to make reference to regulatory and legislative developments at supranational (European Union), state (Spain), regional (Autonomous Community of the Basque Country) and subregional/provincial (Gipuzkoa) levels, as set out in this section.

In the European Union, work-life balance measures initially came under policies aimed at promoting equality between men and women. However, it soon became clear that these policies had been promoted as a means of increasing female employment and boosting economic growth, and since the late 1990s they have been an integral part of the European Employment Strategy (Lewis, 2006). The policies implemented in Spain are true to this philosophy.

The first Spanish legislation on work-life balance dates from 1999 and is clearly women-oriented (Quintanilla, 2005); more specifically, it favours "working mothers" (Tobio, 2005). These were years of conservative government and, according to Peterson (2011:

170), the dominant discourse stressed that women should be integrated into formal employment in the same way as men, even without discussing male labour regulations. Working mothers who combined their careers with looking after their children become the main subjects of gender equality and also a symbol of progress in this field.

Then, during the term in office of the social democratic government, balancing people's personal and family lives with work became a relevant topic within the social policies promoted. Working mothers were still the main recipients of these policies, although their scope was extended to include fathers and the idea of co-responsibility was strengthened. In this sense, the Strategic Plan for Equal Opportunities (2008-2011) extended the idea of the co-responsibility of men and women in looking after children and also incorporated the state as the provider of care services and the guarantor of rights (Ministerio de Igualdad, 2008).

In 2007 the Organic Law on Equality (Gobierno de España, 2007) established a 13-day paternity leave period. In addition to paternity and maternity leave, unpaid leave arrangements were introduced which were designed for looking after children (parental leave); these could be extended until the child was three years old. Another option was a reduction in working hours until the child was 12 years old. In neither case (parental leave or reducing working hours) was there any financial remuneration. In 2009, paternity leave was extended to four weeks with full wages but this measure did not come into force until 2017 for budgetary reasons. A recent study notes that "already in 2010, after the first legislature of remarkable progress in gender equality policies, there has been a reversal in the institutionalisation of equality" (Lombardo, 2016: 8). There is talk of institutional dismantling, budget cuts and legislative stagnation (Lombardo 2017). However, since May 2018, the government is held by the socialist party and this has led to greater commitment to equality between men and women. A royal decree approved, among other measures in favour of gender equality, the extension of paternity leave to 8 weeks (Gobierno de España, 2019). Further extensions are planned in 2020 (12 weeks) and 2021 (16 weeks).

Time is a decisive factor in work-life balance measures, so it should be noted that the latest labour legislation reforms from 2012 curtail the rights of workers to adjust their working time, because the exercising of that rights depends on collective bargaining agreements. The reform leaves reconciliation in the hands of companies in the following work-life rights: leave and reduced working hours for breastfeeding, reduced hours for legal custody of minors below the age of eight or disabled people, holidays and the possibility of changing the distribution of working hours (Espejo, 2015, 63). Other measures, such as the ability of employers to freely alter the working day by up to 10% and the use of overtime in part-time jobs has also reduced the possibilities of work-life reconciliation (Martínez Yáñez, 2015).

Rights in regard to time for looking after adults in need of special care are less developed in law, although there is also the possibility of non-remunerated leave of absence or reduced working hours for up to two years. An example of this more limited development is the formulation of the Dependency Act, Law 39/2006 for the Promotion of Personal Autonomy and Care for Dependent People (Gobierno de España, 2006), in which caring for dependent adults is not considered a matter linked to gender inequality (Perterson, 2011: 173) It should also be noted that the coverage provided by public child care services does not meet current demand (García and Rolansden, 2010).

In the case of the Basque Country, the regional government has powers on certain issues related to gender equality which are complementary to those of the central government. Article 9.1 of the Statute of Autonomy (Gobierno de España, 1979) proclaims the right to equality and non-discrimination on the basis of gender, with a referral to the provisions of the Spanish Constitution of 1978. It also establishes the obligation of public authorities to promote conditions and remove obstacles so that the equality of individuals and of the groups to which they belong is real and effective. However, in the field of employment the basic legislation is enacted at central government level and the powers of the regions are limited to applying Spanish legislation plus some additional measures. In the specific case of work-life balance, the decrees approved by the Basque Government in recent years regarding subsidies (i.e. measures of a promotional nature) acknowledge the authority of the regional government in the fields of social assistance, community development, the status of women and policies governing children, young people and the elderly (See Decree 177/2010 of 29 June of the Basque Government).

Within this framework, the Basque Government has established economic aids for cases of leave of absence and/or reductions in working hours to look after children or dependent persons (Gobierno Vasco, 2008, 2010). The amount of the subsidy depends on household income and in no case does it replace a high percentage of wages. Its scope is, therefore, limited and concentrated on women (90% of cases) due to economic reasons (they have lower wages) and to the patriarchal tradition of society. However, the Basque Government has announced a further improvement in the field of co-responsibility in the near future, so that both parents will have a 16 week parental paid. The 16 weeks of maternity leave and the first 8 weeks of the paternity leave are 100% paid by the national social security system. And for the remaining 8 weeks of paternity leave, fathers may request public aid to offset the wages lost during that period. When we talk about paternity and maternity leave, we refer to the most common case (couples formed by a man and a woman), but it is applicable to all types of couples and also to single-parent families. This is a permit for the birth or the adoption of a child.

Work-life balance policies are more far-reaching in the case of public employees, with measures to favour teleworking, flexible working hours and somewhat longer leave periods (Concilia Plan). A good example of this is the recent measure by the Basque Government for civil servants and public employees which will equal the length of parental leave for both parents (18 weeks). This leave will be 100% paid and non-transferable.

Given the distribution of competencies mentioned above, the provincial council of Gipuzkoa (Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa/Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundia-DFG/GFA) has developed a number of regulations and strategies in recent years designed to promote equality and work-life balance at businesses in the territory. These measures include the 2nd Provincial Equality Plan (2012-2020) (DFG/GFA, 2013), which provides the strategic framework for developing gender equality policies in the relevant years. This plan was prepared at a time of economic crisis and emphasises the sustainability of life and the right to decent care for social transformation. To consolidate this policy, the council passed Provincial Regulation 2/2015 (DFG/GFA, 2015), which pursues the same goal. Two years later, the 1st Provincial Plan for Work-Life Balance (DFG/GFA, 2017) was passed, which included a roadmap intended to make Gipuzkoa “a pioneer in promoting work-life balance and co-responsibility, thus offering all citizens the possibility of living their lives to the full” (DFG/GFA, 2017: 2). In this sense, the plan seeks to persuade companies to become actively involved in this task.

One of the weaknesses in the governance process is the practical application of all these work-life balance measures, i.e. their deployment and specification at businesses (Carrasquer et al., 2015: 76). The most innovative measures are implemented within the framework of individual labour relations, i.e. there is no general rule or regulation governing them. Similarly, the measures are usually not expressly contained in collective agreements and are applied in some areas of organisations (technical, management and administration) but not in others (production) (ibid.:99). The increasing level of job insecurity also contributes to this: in many cases measures recognised as rights are not implemented at all and younger generations are especially affected by the lack of a consolidated general framework governing work-life balance.

In general, work-life balance and participation models such as this one can be found in many central and southern European countries. It can be rated as intermediate based on its results regarding gender equality. It is characterised by the absence of a comprehensive network of public services to facilitate the co-responsibility of public authorities in looking after dependent individuals and by a structure of parental leave that results in women being mainly responsible for looking after children, given that there are few parental leave periods which are non-transferrable between the couple; there is also little or any compensation for wages lost during extended leaves of absence (McColgan, 2015; Van Belle, 2016; Castro and Pazos, 2008). Therefore, despite the regulatory progress mentioned in this section, these measures and their limited level of implementation result in a situation in which part-time employment (mainly among women) becomes the main instrument used to achieve work-life balance in practical terms.

4. Analysis of the factors affecting the implementation of work-life balance measures by businesses

This paper seeks first and foremost to understand the measures, policies and services designed to support work-life-family balance and their links with the characteristics of companies. To that end, we have studied private companies in Gipuzkoa and seek to compare our results with trends observed in other similar studies in order to contribute to a better understanding and thus to improvements in the design of public policies to promote these issues and raise awareness.

Below, this section outlines the main features of the economy of Gipuzkoa from a gender perspective and gives details of the sample of companies selected and how the data was obtained. We then present the results of our research.

4.1. Characteristics of the production and labour structure of Gipuzkoa from a gender perspective

The Basque province of Gipuzkoa (see location on Figure 2) has a surface area of 1,980 km² and a population totalling just over 700,000 (51% women). A clear ageing trend can be seen in the fact that over-65s account for 21% of the total population. It is a province with a relatively high per capita GDP (31,352 Euros) which places it near the top of the ranking in Spain and in a good position in a European context. The unemployment rate is relatively moderate (13%) given the situation in the country as a whole, although there is clearly room for improvement (Eustat, 2016).

Figure 2: Location of the region of Gipuzkoa in Europe

Source: Own work

A sectoral analysis of the economy of Gipuzkoa reveals that although it is a services-based economy the service sector is less highly developed than in other nearby advanced economies. Industry in general, and metal manufacturing in particular, is still highly important, and its relative weight in Gross Value Added and employment is higher than the Spanish and European Union averages. Specifically, industry accounts for 31% of GDP and 30% of employment, while the average figures for the EU-28 are 19% and 22%. On the other hand, the primary sector is very small in terms of both employment and output (1%) (Eurostat, 2017; INE, 2017a, 2017b). From a gender perspective, the main employment-generating fields in the region are clearly segregated by gender and there are few fields in which the concentration of women is greater than that of men. The ten fields in which most women are employed account for 68.7% of employed women in Gipuzkoa, while in the case of men the ten main fields of employment account for 58.3% (Eustat, 2011).

The income inequalities observed in the region stem mainly from labour inequalities. A look at the jobs that women and men are doing reveals a significant difference in terms of distribution by large labour categories and highlights the overrepresentation of women among the inactive population. Only 52% of women over the age of 16 state that they are available for work, while the working rate for men in Gipuzkoa stands at 63%. In this regard, the employment gap shows that traces of the classic gender-based division of labour are still present. Regarding the labour force participation of people with children, the birth of a second child is found to increase the differences between male and female activity rates (15% gap) and between male and female employment rates (17% gap) (Eustat, 2015a).

In addition, the average annual salary stands at 28,076 Euros for men and 21,018 Euros for women. This means that the wage gap between men and women in Gipuzkoa is 25.1%, so the working year for women would need to be 123 days longer for them to earn wages similar to those of men (data supplied by the Treasury Department of the Provincial Council of Gipuzkoa). It is also noteworthy that 25% of women in Gipuzkoa are in fixed-term jobs, compared to 20% of men. Furthermore, although the total rate of part-time employment in Gipuzkoa is not very high, it is clearly higher among women than among men: there is a 19 point gap in detriment to women. This inequality can probably be put down to the persistence of the idea that part-time jobs are suitable for women so that they can reconcile their jobs and domestic chores and look after the house. In other words, the perception is that unpaid work is primarily the responsibility of women and part-time employment can be considered as a type of work-life balance method for them (Eustat, 2015a, 2015b). Thus, it is sometimes said that we have gone from the traditional “male bread winner/housewife” model to a “male bread-winner/woman responsible for unpaid work and employed part-time or working fewer hours in the market” model.

4.2. Data and methodology

This study is based on a survey of 503 private sector businesses with more than 20 employees, all of which belong to production sectors identified as key for the economy of Gipuzkoa. Information on these businesses was obtained from the Iberian Balance Sheet Analysis System (Sistema de Análisis de Balances Ibéricos - SABI) and from telephone calls made in September and October 2016. 293 valid questionnaires were

received (58% response rate), 190 of them from industrial companies and 103 from service companies. 63% of these firms employ between 10 and 49 people and 6.8% employ more than 250; one-third of the respondents are family businesses (Table A1 in the appendix lists the main characteristics of the businesses that answered the questionnaires).

The questionnaire comprises 17 questions related to work-life-family balance measures, services and policies provided by the firms (see Figure 3). The first twelve questions focus on measures geared towards increased work-time or workplace flexibility and on access to short and long-term leaves of absence. There were four possible answers: “no-one”, “some people”, “most employees”, and “all employees”. Businesses are considered to provide these measures when they are available to most or all employees. In the questions designed to elicit an understanding of the implementation of work-life balance policies and services there were two possible answers, and the affirmative answers are counted.

Furthermore, the questionnaire designed for the research project includes questions designed to reveal the characteristics of businesses, such as the sector in which they operate (industry or services), the size of the workforce and whether or not they are family businesses. Secondly, information was also gathered about the workforce, such as the percentage of female workers, the percentage of female management staff and the average age of the workforce. Thirdly and lastly, the characteristics of the respondent are also taken into account (gender and position).

In this context the questions raised are geared towards understanding the level of implementation at each company of measures, services and policies designed to promote work-life balance and, in particular, to identify links between equality and work-life balance policies at companies and their characteristics as businesses. To that end the multivariate linear regression system was used and the following equation was proposed:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{Sector} + \beta_2 \times \log \text{Size} + \beta_3 \times \text{Family} + \beta_4 \times \% \text{women} + \beta_5 \times \% \text{women managers} + \beta_6 \times \text{Average age}(1) + \beta_7 \times \text{Average age}(2) + \beta_8 \times \text{Sex} + \beta_9 \times \text{Position}(1) + \beta_{10} \times \text{Position}(2) + \beta_{11} \times \text{Position}(3) + \text{error}.$$

The dependent variable (Y) represents the number of work-life balance measures provided by the company. The sum of the work-life balance measures and policies that affect all or most of the employees of a company is taken into account in calculating this figure. On the other hand, independent variables can be classified into three groups: firstly, those that provide information on the characteristics of each business are taken into account, such as the sector in which it operates (reference sector: industry), the workforce (taken as a logarithm) and whether or not it is a family business (family business as the reference). Secondly, the characteristics of the workforce are described in terms of the percentage of women, the percentage of female management staff and the average age of the workforce (the reference is a workforce with an average age of less than 30). Thirdly and lastly, the characteristics of the respondent are taken into account (gender and position, taking a woman and a human resources officer at the company as the reference categories, respectively).

4.3. Results and discussion

A study of the responses reveals that the measures most widely implemented at businesses in Gipuzkoa are permission for all or most of the workforce to leave their workplaces in

case of a family emergency (applied in virtually all the companies surveyed), followed by not scheduling meetings outside working hours (77.4% of businesses).

The most widely available work-time or workplace flexibility measure in place is holiday flexibility, which is applied in almost 70% of the companies surveyed. Flexibility measures implemented at an average level include reduced working hours, flexible working hours, part-time work and continuous working hours in summer. The least frequently implemented measures are compressed workdays and reduced lunchtimes. The incidence of teleworking is merely testimonial at 2%. Among leave and extended leave policies, extended leave for personal or family-related reasons is implemented at an intermediate level (62%), while maternity and paternity leaves outside statutory measures are available at 36% of the companies, a relatively low number.

In the section covering policies and services that favour work-life balance, the most widely implemented measure is not scheduling meetings outside working hours. The “lights out” policy is implemented at an average level, canteen services are offered by 23% of businesses and very few offer kindergarten services. There are practically no cases of financial aid for looking after family members.

Figure 3: Percentage of businesses in which most or all employees can benefit from the following work-life balance measures

Source: Own work

The model used to find links between the number of measures implemented and the characteristics of each business gives the results shown in the table below (see Table 1).

Table 1: Results of the regression analysis

	Non-standardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Standard error	Beta		
(Constant)	5.609	0.889		6.308	0.000
Activity (services)	1.826	0.502	0.286	3.640	0.000
Total workforce (log)	1.430	0.493	0.172	2.900	0.004
Non-family business	-0.065	-1.072	0.285	-0.069	0.943
% of women in the workforce	-0.055	0.009	-0.467	-5.959	0.000
% of women in positions of management and/or responsibility	-0.012	-0.170	0.865	-0.011	0.726
Average age(1) Average age from 30 to 40	0.063	1.058	0.291	0.068	0.971
Average age(2) Average age more than 40	-0.08	-1.326	0.186	-0.085	0.953
Gender (Male)	-0.002	-0.034	0.973	-0.002	0.987
Position(1) Manager	0.02	0.330	0.742	0.021	0.924
Position (2) Intermediate manager	-0.046	-0.761	0.447	-0.049	0.957
Position (3) Other positions	-0.097	-1.558	0.120	-0.100	0.905
Adjusted R ²	0.141				
F (sign)	14.415 (0.000)				
N	247				

Note: The reference categories are Industry, Family Business, Average Age of Workforce under 30, Woman (for the question on the gender of the respondent), and In Charge of Human Resources (for the position held by the respondent to the questionnaire)

The analysis reflects that the largest number of work-life balance measures tend to be applied by businesses in the service sector, larger-sized firms and those that employ a smaller percentage of women. On the other hand, the variables related to the family nature of a business, the percentage of women in management positions, the average age of the workforce and the characteristics of the survey respondent were found not be significant in the model. It should be noted that this model explains 14% of the variance: 7.6% is explained by the percentage of women employees, 3.8% by the sector in which the business operates and 2.6% by the size of the workforce.

In the companies consulted, service-sector businesses tend to have more work-life balance measures than industrial firms, although it is important to note that there are differences among the businesses in both sectors regarding the number of work-life balance measures implemented. There is a higher percentage of industrial companies at the extremes of the availability ranking (with the most/least measures), while the percentage of companies ranked as intermediate is higher in the services sector. Other studies conducted at state level reach similar conclusions and find that businesses in the services sector tend more towards implementing work-life balance measures (Chinchilla et al., 2006; Carnicer et al., 2002).

Our findings also suggest that larger businesses tend to have more measures. This is related, among other factors, to the promotion of work-like balance measures as part of an outreach strategy used by businesses to improve their brand image or to generate better conditions to move towards a more flexible work-organisation structure. In addition, in the wake of the enacting of the Equality Act in 2007, large businesses in Spain are required to implement measures that promote equality and work-life balance. This requirement is included in tenders for public contracts, which makes it an incentive for businesses to provide their workforces with these options (Carrasquer et al., 2015).

We now look in more detail at the finding that companies with lower percentages of women in their workforces tend to provide more work-life balance measures. In fact, in the model submitted here this variable explains, to a large extent, the variation in the number of measures offered by businesses. This result is consistent with other studies conducted in this field, which indicate that a larger proportion of women in the workforce is related to the implementation of some work-life balance policies but not to others (Chinchilla et al., 2006). Carrasquer et al. (2015) suggest that it is the predominantly-female sectors in the most insecure segments of the labour market that encounter the greatest problems in developing work-life balance measures. In this sense, Carnicer et al. (2002) conclude that it may be the percentage of female professionals that leads to businesses offering more measures; they connect this with the tendency of businesses to implement certain measures that only benefit the higher-ranking or senior levels of the workforce.

A more in-depth analysis in this regard, taking into account the more specific areas of activity included in the study, provides relevant information for understanding the range of work-life balance measures currently on offer at businesses in Gipuzkoa (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Ratio of the proportion of women employees to the number of work-life balance measures offered by businesses per area of activity.

Source: Own work

In the most predominantly-female area of activity in the services sector (healthcare, retail trade, accommodation and food service activities), businesses provide fewer standard work-life reconciliation measures than in predominantly-male industries (machinery and equipment manufacturing, metallurgy, metal product manufacturing). In addition, in areas of activity with more balanced workforces from a gender perspective, the situations differ from case to case, with fewer measures on average in industry (manufacturing of food, beverages and tobacco) than in services (law and architecture).

Indeed, a closer look at two of the areas of activity in industry included in the study with different production and business situations reveals that neither of them tends to offer more measures in businesses with predominantly-female workforces. The first case is that of the food, beverage and tobacco industry, which tends to employ a high percentage of women. Not only does it provide fewer work-life balance measures on average but there is no evidence of greater effort by businesses with higher percentages of women in their workforces (Figure 5). The same trend can also be found in metalworking industries, where the average percentage of women in the workforce is very low and the number of measures offered is, in general, higher (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Ratio of the percentage of women employees to the number of work-life balance measures offered by businesses in the food, beverage and tobacco industry

Source: Own work

Figure 6: Ratio of the percentage of women employees to the number of work-life balance measures offered by businesses in the metalworking industry

Source: Own work

This may be due to several interrelated factors, which may lead companies with lower percentages of women in their workforces to be more willing to provide work-life balance measures.

On the one hand, the current distribution of childcare tasks between men and women means that businesses expect most of their male employees not to apply for these measures, so the cost of implementing them will be very small. The data show that in the economy of Gipuzkoa it is still mainly women who deal with childcare tasks. Although progress has been made in this regard, the distribution is still far from equitable when it comes to looking after children and the elderly (Eustat, 2015b). On the other hand, in businesses with large percentages of women the costs of implementing work-life balance measures will be greater since the actual demand for them can be expected to be high. Consequently, in businesses with predominantly-male workforces the work-life balance measures on offer bring obvious benefits in brand image while the actual implementation costs are low.

Another argument is based on the fact that in Gipuzkoa, as in other highly-industrialised territories, long-established industrial firms with predominantly-male workforces have managed over time to improve and maintain relatively good working conditions on the basis of signing labour agreements. This may have facilitated the inclusion of measures aimed at work-life balance to a greater extent than in other sectors where collective bargaining is not so strong. However, it should be noted that numerous reports mention the limits of collective bargaining when it comes to promoting the implementation of

work-life balance measures in negotiations. Thus, it appears that the low level of representation of women at negotiating tables (as representatives of both trade unions and businesses) and the consideration of work-life balance as a secondary issue compared to other major issues (such as wages or preserving employment levels) means that this is not the most dynamic method of promoting work-life balance (Torres et al., 2008; Carrasquer et al., 2007). In any case, although collective bargaining has shown obvious limitations in this field, the results of our analysis imply that its impact on the implementation of work-life balance measures at businesses may be positive, even if it is only indirectly by improving overall working conditions.

Thirdly, sometimes it is businesses themselves that take the initiative and propose work-life balance plans to their workers that have not been negotiated in advance. In such cases the measures offered are aimed at a very specific, small part of the workforce, generally those in the highest positions of the company hierarchy and those mainly engaged in administrative and managerial work (not directly linked to production) (Carrasquer et al., 2015). Therefore, there may be businesses that are favouring a small part of their workforces with their work-life balance policies, based on the hierarchical position of employees in the company. This trend does not take into account the area of activity or the features of the workforce at such companies.

5. Conclusion and policy implications

In the past few decades, significant progress has been made in legislation, policy and awareness-raising to boost the provision of work-life balance measures, but their effective implementation is still limited in private companies today. The ability of businesses to implement work-life balance policies can be divided into three stages (Lee et al., 2000 cited in Arthur and Cook, 2003: 242). The first is the accommodation stage, in which support from the business is minimal. The second stage is preparation, in which businesses enter into a new routine with regard to work-life balance but do not cease to act as they did previously, so employees who make use of work-life balance policies may be penalised by not being promoted or missing out on pay rises within the organisation. Finally, in the third stage the work-life balance policy is accepted as a new routine for helping employees become more efficient and the benefits arising from its implementation are maximised. From the data obtained, businesses from Gipuzkoa appear to be in the second stage (preparation), in which institutional requirements are pushing for progress in this direction but companies are still reluctant to put more in-depth, wide-ranging measures in place as an integral part of their operations.

However, empirical evidence indicates that the offering of work-life balance measures by businesses is linked to the area in which companies operate and to their size. Larger businesses in the services sector tend to offer the most measures. Similarly, the percentage of women in a company's workforce is relevant in addressing this issue, i.e. the degree of to which the workforce in the business is predominantly-female. According to our findings, the businesses with the lowest percentage of women in their workforces tend to offer more measures. These results highlight the ample room for manoeuvre that exists today in the business sector regarding the degree to which work-life balance measures are implemented. Thus, if their implementation is left in the hands of each business, their introduction will depend to a large extent on the organisational characteristics of the company and on its particular perception of the costs and benefits of their implementation. The most sophisticated work-life balance policies may appear neutral but mainly target women, especially those women who are best placed in the labour market (public-sector

workers, professionals, etc.) while men in senior positions may access these measures on a discretionary basis.

On the other hand, it is essential to analyse how work-life-family balance can be promoted in insecure or increasingly unstable working environments. There are many indicators that show that women work under worse conditions, which makes it even harder for them to demand adequate work-life balance measures and services. In this sense a significant proportion of jobs occupied by women are part-time, fixed-term and/or discontinuous, not because they enjoy better or greater work-life balance measures but because the insecurity of such jobs and sometimes enables them to do reproductive work without having to rely on other kinds of measure. In fact, numerous studies point out that the main form of work-life balance in Southern European economies is the high rate of part-time employment among women, which enables them to perform reproductive work for society through subordinate access to paid employment. In general, the perception is that the state and businesses are promoting forms of work-life reconciliation adapted to the working structures and organisation of companies. In addition, many of the measures actually end up removing women from the workforce (through leave, reduced working hours and extended leave arrangements) instead of promoting measures that will make the working hours of men and women more flexible so that they do not have to leave work during periods when they need to dedicate more time to reproductive work (Carrasquer et al., 2015; Torres et al., 2008; CEOE, 2017).

Thus, the funding, promotional and awareness-raising measures designed by public administrations need to carefully study the characteristics and demographics of the businesses that they are targeting, so that work-life balance measures focus on providing men and women with greater flexibility regarding working hours instead of designing measures that encourage them to leave work, especially in the more predominantly female areas of activity.

Furthermore, it is important to understand the actual use that workers make of the measures offered and their actual requirements in this field. With that in mind, there is a need to stress the importance of empirical studies to identify the effective use of the work-life reconciliation measures implemented by businesses and the barriers detected when they are used by workers. Progress is also needed in consolidating a reference and shared framework that can decisively promote co-responsibility and practices that keep people in work through more flexible business-employee agreements regarding work-life balance.

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Annex. Table A1. Characteristics of the firms included in the sample

			Number	Percentage
Characteristics of the firm	Size (workforce)	Small (between 18 and 49)	186	63,7%
		Medium (between 50 and 249)	86	29,5%
		Large (more than 250)	20	6,8%
		Not available	1	0,3%
		Total	293	100,0%
	Area of activity	Retail trade	15	5,1%
		Accommodation and food service activities	22	7,5%
		Education	16	5,5%
		Telecommunications	4	1,4%
		Healthcare activities	9	3,1%
		Computer programming, consultancy and related activities	8	2,7%
		Research and development	2	0,7%
		Legal, accounting and management consultancy activities	14	4,8%
		Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis	13	4,4%
		Subtotal for services	103	32,1%
		Manufacture of machinery and equipment	52	17,7%
		Manufacture of basic iron and steel and of ferroalloys	70	23,9%
		Manufacture of basic metals and fabricated metal products, except machinery and equipment	44	15,0%
		Manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products	5	1,7%
		Manufacture of food, beverages and tobacco	19	6,5%
		Subtotal for industry	190	67,9%
		Total	293	100,0%
	Family firm	Yes	94	32,1%
		No	196	66,9%
		Not available	3	1,0%
		Total	293	100,0%
	Characteristics of the workforce	Percentage of women employees	0%- 40%	190
40%-60%			52	17,1%
More than 60%			50	17,1%
Not available			1	0,3%
Total			293	100,2%
Percentage of women in management positions		0%-40%	179	61,1%
		40%-60%	73	24,9%
		More than 60%	41	14%
		Total	293	100,0%
Average age of workforce		Less than 30	10	3,4%
		From 30 to 40	142	48,5%
		From 40 to 50	139	47,4%
		Not available	2	0,7%
	Total	293	100,0%	
Characteristics of the survey respondent	Sex	Woman	191	65,2%
		Man	102	34,8%
		Total	293	100,0%
	Position	Management position	72	24,6%
		Intermediate position	27	9,2%
		Head of Human Resources	112	38,2%

	Other	82	28,0%
	Total	293	100,0%

Figure 1

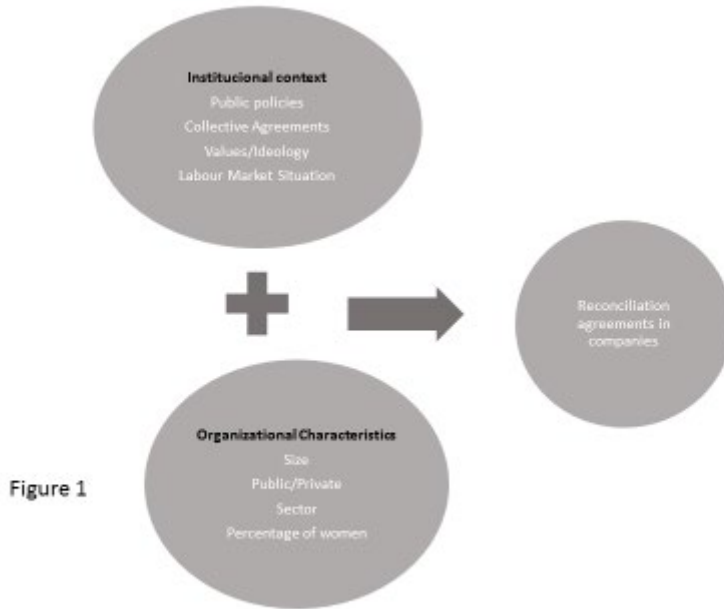
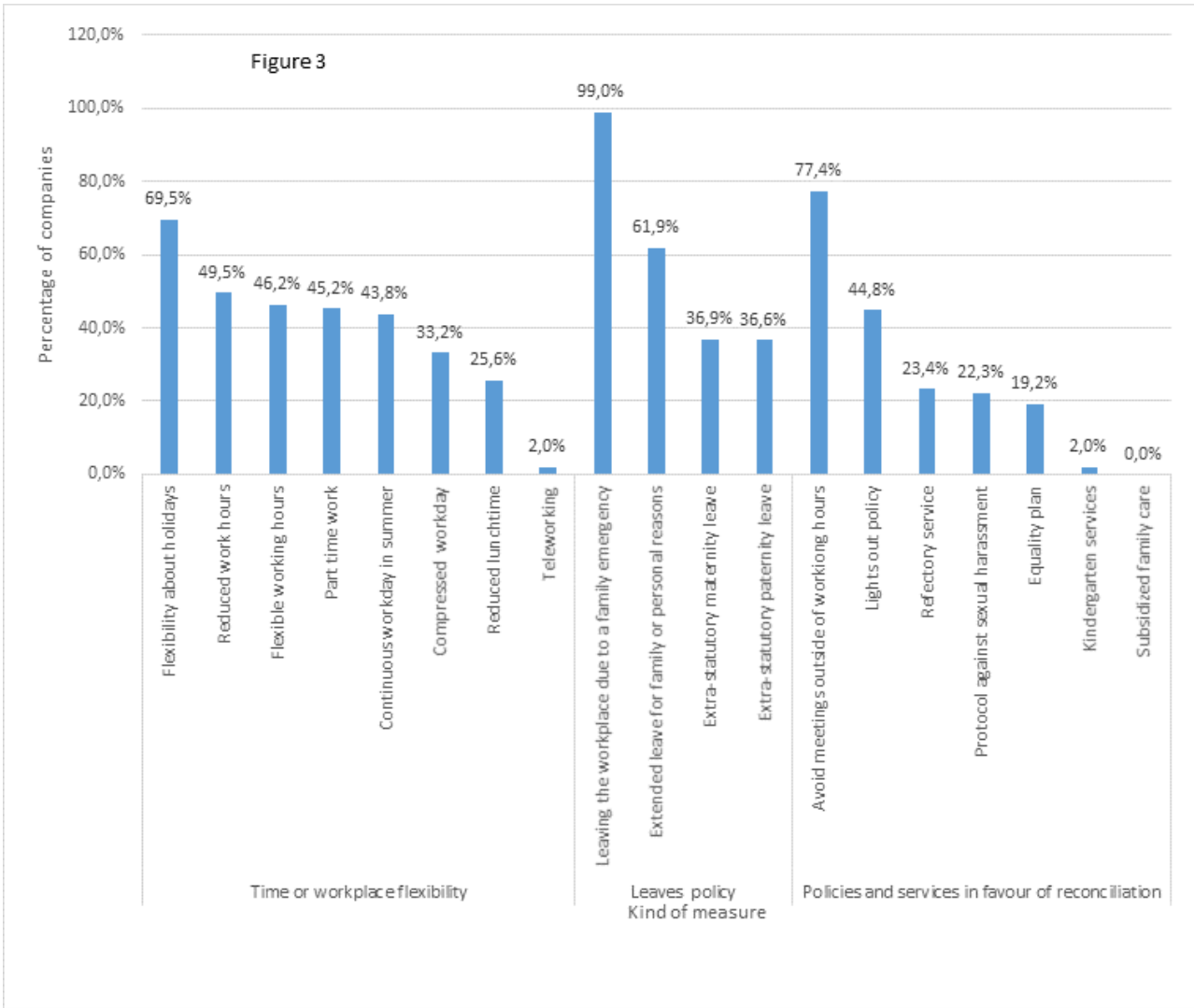


Figure 1

Figure 2





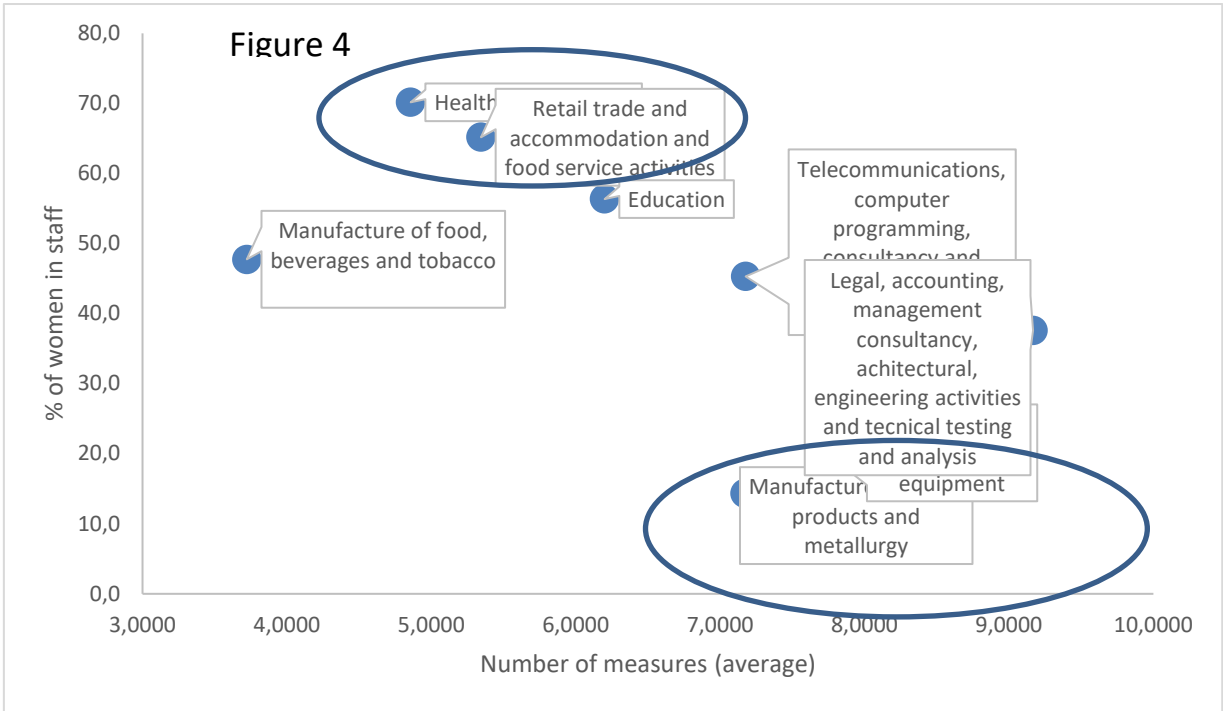


Figure 4

