



# WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES TWENTY YEARS AFTER FINISHING UNIVERSITY

## Executive summary

Employment outcome studies repeatedly show that qualifications have a key influence on the characteristics of access to the labour market, such as different employment rates and speeds, chances of ending up working in the public or private sector and wages, among others. As men and women are not randomly distributed by qualification (a phenomenon known as horizontal segmentation), attributing whether the gender differences detected in employment outcomes are attributable to qualification or direct or indirect inequalities is a complex issue.

This report analyses the quality of employment outcomes from a gender perspective twenty years after obtaining the equivalent of a university degree. This is the third study that AQU Catalunya has carried out to assess the differences between men and women in the labour market. In the first (AQU CATALUNYA, 2010), the differences were analysed three years after graduation and found many more similarities than differences: the degree studied and individual variability had a greater impact on employment outcomes than gender. These findings match other studies that show that differences between women in different occupations are more relevant than those between men and women within the same occupation (EUROFOUND, 2013). The second study from a gender perspective (AQU CATALUNYA, 2012) analysed differences ten years after graduation and by then more imbalances were detected (in working hours, pay and reasons for working part-time), but also fewer differences than might initially have been intuited. One of the hypotheses as to why the differences were less than expected was that phenomena such as the glass ceiling or wage discrimination had not yet appeared, since even ten years after graduation, few people were yet to become parents (only 40%).

This latest study, carried out twenty years after graduation, can definitively grasp the differences between men and women in the labour market, as three quarters of the respondents already have offspring, and can pinpoint the most decisive factors.

The main conclusions are as follows:

- Among people who have attained higher education, differences by gender in percentage employment, unemployment and inactivity tend to disappear. In other words, high investment in human capital reduces differences between men and women. Therefore, women's incorporation into university has led to an advance in equality in the labour market, although, as shown below, there are still differences.
- In this study, starting a family does not imply employment inactivity. Even among inactive people, the main cause is not family issues, but retirement or health reasons

(for both men, 72%, and women, 87%). However, this is clearly higher for women (19.6%) than for men (4.3%).

- Once in the labour market, inequalities become apparent in terms of **type of working day, earnings and performing executive/management roles**. Part-time work is clearly feminised (16.3% women vs 5% men). Unsurprisingly, it is the most influential variable on wage earnings and its impact on earnings once a person leaves the labour market should not be forgotten. Moreover, in theoretical terms of human capital depreciation, it affects opportunities for promotion and taking up positions of responsibility.
- Men and women benefit equally from **work-life balance measures**, but there is clear segregation in such measures: women adopt flexible hours (64.2%) or a **shorter working day (56.4%)**, while men opt for flexitime (82.5%), intensive working days (60.5%), or (56.5%) working from home. All of them measures that do not imply a reduction in participation in the labour market. A shorter working day, similar to part-time work, is a flexibility mechanism that can impact on success in employment.
- Within the group of full-time workers, a **clear wage gap** is detected: three years after graduating, women's earnings were 86% those of their male peers, **dropping to 82%** after 20 years. However, it is important to note that the **degree** remains the factor that has the greatest impact on wage inequalities, explaining **18% of the variability** in annual gross earnings of the respondents.
- There is also a **glass ceiling**: women who hold management positions represent 7.5% of the total, while for men it is 16.9%. What does the assumption of positions of responsibility over other people depend on? **Men are twice as likely** to occupy these positions, **having children** increases options by **73%**, **for both men and women**, and those working in the **private sector** are **58%** more likely to hold such position than those in the public sector.
- Finally, the team of experts who collaborated on the study make an assessment of the conclusions and highlight some points of particular interest: higher education as a mechanism for equal opportunities, the importance of putting more effort into a co-educational policy that allows for an informed choice and educational and professional paths free of any gender convention, and, lastly, greater flexibility in work-life balance measures, under the premise of greater co-responsibility to build a more equitable and just society for all. This is the only way to lay the foundations for a more equitable system that permits each individual's full educational and professional development.

This study would not have been possible without the valuable collaboration of the seven Catalan public universities, the Secretariat for Universities and the Catalan Women's Institute. We would also like to express our special thanks to the almost 3,000 people who answered the survey, without whom it would be impossible to progress in consolidating a gender perspective in employment outcome studies.

We hope this report will provide a major contribution to the study of the working conditions for male and female graduates from the Catalan university system, and we invite the academic

community to analyse the data from this survey in greater depth. We also trust that the results we present here will serve to generate debate and help bring about improvements to Catalan university degree courses in terms of gender, to generate equal opportunities in the labour market.