

Addressing gender promotion gap in Spain: women and invisibility in the context of telework

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Gender disparity in the labour market is a pervasive issue that impacts women's career trajectories from the onset of employment and continues throughout their professional lives, influencing job promotions, salaries, and access to social security benefits (Moraru, 2022). The Covid-19 crisis in Spain has brought to light the significance of fostering connections between remote and on-site workers, particularly in addressing and mitigating potential gender gaps that may emerge in telecommuting arrangements (Alvarez Cuesta, 2020). The underrepresentation of women in high-responsibility positions emphasises the critical need for the implementation of policies and measures aimed at promoting gender equality, specifically within job promotion processes. Little is known about inclusion of teleworkers into the corporate culture and specifics of their career advancement especially from a gender perspective. This chapter looks at how women embodied their professional tasks remotely and why they face hurdles upon their career track specifically while teleworking. Findings from the analysis of 30 in-depth interviews conducted with female workers and experts on labour and gender in Spain point to the complexity and contradictions in the talent discovery and career development carried out by women and provide ways of improving this situation.

Keywords: Discrimination, telework, career advancement, gender, labour market.

Introduction

Labour market is a profoundly intricate and multifaceted institution, marked by hurdles for women starting from the stage of preparation (education inequality), continuing with lower rates of entry for female workers comparing to men, worsening upon a double burden of additional reproductive labour and up to issues of retirement (pension gap) (Schneider, 2021). The advancement of technology and digitalization of the labour market have redefined employment as a number of opportunities which can be done

presentially, remotely or in a hybrid (mixed) mode (Donnelly and Johns, 2020). In this ‘atypical employment’ (Westhoff, 2024) personal productivity and advancement, as captured by supervisors, have been maintained as an important indicator for career progression (Yarberry and Sims, 2021). Teleworking, however, encompasses one dimension that is neither recognised nor rewarded in such career evaluations, even though it frequently occurs: working place coincides with living space (Gibson et al, 2023). Both employees and employers expect that work from home would support their well-being and allow them to cope with other multiple tasks outside of work.

This chapter adds to the literature on women’s experiences in teleworking by looking at the relationship between professional activity, remote mode of work and career advancement after the COVID-19 pandemic (hereafter referred to as ‘the pandemic’). We explore how women located in Spain defined their main professional priorities within activities after the global health crisis as well as experts explain limitations and difficulties of those desiring to work remotely. We seek to investigate the embodied experiences of women in wishing to be an active part of corporate culture even though not being present at the company premises. We document opinions of experts who assess the invisibility of female workers as a main reason for their career stagnation. Evidence has been gleaned from our qualitative research, which was conducted in Spain between February and June 2023 and comprised 15 in-depth interviews with female workers and 15 interviews with experts. Our empirical analysis reveals that the profuse dedication of many women to their activities on the same position and their decision to relinquish career advancement stem from a complex matrix of gendered norms in which neoliberal mindsets, double burden of productive and reproductive labour and specific historical moment at the labour market intertwine in the practice of remote labour with no feasible career advancement.

The technological advancement of world and Spanish labour market upon the pandemic took place due the sanitary crisis, and the months of curfews (March-November 2020 in Spain) were key in heightening the tendency of telework, as it was legitimised by the necessity to avoid a mass proliferation of infection and enforced its acceptance by companies that led to the intensification of remote labour (Aloisi and De Stefano, 2022). In the last years, as these new human resource management logics progressed, conditions of employment changed dramatically, marked by a rise in number of remote and hybrid positions and steep increase in workload with women being more affected than men due to the feminization of telework (Gravel, 2023). A growing number of

women in Spain have been choosing a remote mode of work as an alleged way of conciliation (Rosas Tosas et al, 2023). Along with this expanding tendency, the precarity advanced considerably, introducing a higher number of part-time jobs which are initially an intrinsic feature of the Spanish labour market and a frequent choice of Spanish women (Garcia-Perez et al, 2022). Spanish female teleworkers, however, are not equally affected by the ‘double burden’ imperative. Aiming to ‘survive’ on a labour market, those with additional parenting or care tasks feel the pressure to accept precarious conditions of employment more intensely than those who do not obtain family responsibilities (Lanau and Lozano, 2022).

The persistence of gender inequalities in Spanish society, in turn, is linked to the country’s long dictatorial regime (1936–1975), which underpinned enduring beliefs about the myth of women as carers. For instance, the division of domestic labour within full-time, dual earner couples in Spain is one of the most unequal in Europe, with care work towards children remaining central to women’s time allocation (Garcia-Roman, 2023). As a result, Spain ranks 6th in the European Union (EU) 2023 Gender Equality Index with a score of 76.4 – below Sweden with 82.2 – when comparing women’s and men’s allocation of time to caring activities (EIGE EI for GE, 2023). Moreover, as authors have stated, even among skilled women, their traditional [care] role in the family seems to remain constantly present in their lives . Thus, women are expected to find their way to take care of home chores at the expense of career advancement. According to Meeussen et al (2020) it seems that the traditional sexual division of labour still persists with women being more identified with the caring roles and, as such, and men being more associated with managerial roles.

Advancement and professional promotion in the context of telework

The outbreak of the pandemic led to a rise in the number of teleworkers that went slightly down after the end of curfews but increased awareness of what telework is among companies and employees (Eurofound, 2023). As Afota et al, 2022 argue, the extra effort made by employees to meet a demand for remote work has remained largely invisible. In the ‘gendered labour market’ (Seo, 2023), women have carried most of the burden related to home chores and child and elderly care. This has compromised their availability for fulfilling other dimensions of their professional activities and, thus, also their future career opportunities (Anastosoupoulou et al, 2023). The expectation that women will be mainly responsible for any necessary caregiving is being normalised in

many different contexts, including the Spanish (Morero-Mínguez and Ortega-Gaspar, 2022), despite not being specifically considered anywhere legally. According to (Watson, 2000), the general idea of reproductive and unpaid care work relates to the unwritten but solidified patriarchal norms, traditionally linked to feminised jobs, to manage their emotions and offer appropriate emotional support to others.

1. In the current neoliberal world, however, expectations regarding the role of women have changed profoundly. The labour-consuming culture that has arisen from the obsession with productivity has been reproduced in numerous contexts, such as the Portuguese, Spanish and Latin American (Potzsch, 2022). It has led to the development of a complex monitoring apparatus aimed at quantifying labour, which also encompasses corporate culture activities (Trivedi and Patel, 2021). The corporatisation of the work as a marketplace has added to this, turning supervisors into consumers of labour whose satisfaction with the services provided becomes vital for the maintenance of employment and career track development (Stamolampros et al, 2019). In this context, managers have adopted an entitled attitude in their demands for eternal availability and attention from their subordinates that ended up in limitless connectivity and never-ending working day for remote workers (Cewinska and Striker, 2023). Due to the gendered expectation that women are naturally responsive and afraid to lose their jobs, women shoulder a heavier burden in this regard compared with men, resulting in an exhausting load of labour that they have to perform (Hjalmsdottir and Bjarnadottir, 2021). Managers have higher expectations of their women employees being more available to them than men (Tabassum and Nayak, 2021). These gendered expectations shape the evaluations given by supervisors, in which female employees tend to be assessed not only on the basis of their productivity and professional skills but also on their full-time availability, their willingness to accept lower or no promotion, their patience (CEWINSKA AND STRIKER, 2023). However, as the capacity to accept worse conditions than men is essentialised as natural to women, it has been taken for granted, gaining neither or low attention (Anastosoupoulou et al, 2023). Stagnation within the same position for a continuous time is indisputably an essential aspect of female work, and it does involve a personal belief of women of “not deserving more” (NEKOEI AND SINN, 2021). Thus, the boundaries between real invisibility at work and personal self-negligence are not straightforwardly clear. The request for professional promotion requires effort, time and energy, which can also be tiring and stressful; however, the reciprocal and relational realities of corporate culture nourish

more those who are within the sight of management and this deserve the growth more (BUNJAK ET AL, 2023). Corporate culture relates to the radical transformative practice of building collective spaces of solidarity (YARBERRY AND SIMS, 2021), challenging the neoliberal drive towards extra-hours work and individualisation logics. For the authors the successful career in modern private enterprise is a political stance that challenges the individualist line of thought in a performative way, as it encompasses reciprocity in the giving “best of you to the company” and receiving of advancement in terms of career and income. Building on the view of Alexander(2022), we understand ‘career development’ as an ongoing complex relational construction, produced through professional skills practice. For Rosas Tosas et al (2023), the ‘embodied and physical’ practice of labour produces and enacts career advancement as a necessary element, so that a certain progress at work can never be considered entirely removed from job satisfaction. In turn job satisfaction as a part of quality of work focuses on the interdependency and interconnectedness of human relationships and insists on addressing our need for recognition (AFOTA ET AL, 2023). Modern employment, however, frequently dismisses the need dimension of career development (ALOISI AND DE STEFANO, 2022). As a result, work becomes essentially precarious in a standardised scheme production - income exchange, undermining its pleasurable and reciprocal parts (POTZSCH, 2022).

With the advance of neoliberal logic, employment has become careless of people and values, and its culture of performativity has fostered individualism and an ethos of competitive productivity with no acknowledgement, hampering any space for work merit to thrive (HOSKIN AND WHILEY, 2023). As Schneider (2021) argues, in careless companies, even the care of one’s own emotional wellbeing is incidental – let alone care for workers themselves. Morero-Mínguez and Ortega-Gaspar (2022), looking at the Spanish context, observed that, meanwhile, in aiming at promoting employee corporate culture and job retention, modern employment has engaged in an affective turn, a rhetorical new emphasis on getting the best out of one worker and then simply exchanging him for a new one.

The brief landscape of telework in Spain

The landscape of telework shifted significantly due to the sanitary crisis beginning in March 2020, coinciding with developments in neighbouring countries where remote

work has already seen a notable surge (ALOISI AND STEFANO, 2022). The number of regular teleworkers in Spain increased from 951,800 in 2019 to 3,015,200 in 2020 (RANDSTAD, 2020). In 2022 based on data from Statista 12,6% of women and 12,5 of men were working remotely¹. From 2020 to 2022, there has been a notable shift in work arrangements. The percentage of workers in a hybrid system has increased from 4.2 percent to 6.3 percent during this period. In contrast, the share of workers predominantly telecommuting has decreased since 2020, reaching 7.6 percent in 2022.² However, the potential for remote work has expanded considerably. Estimates suggest that close to 28% of all jobs in Spain can be performed remotely, encompassing tasks previously restricted to on-site roles (ALVAREZ CUESTA, 2020). Moreover, both employers and workers demonstrate a keen interest in adopting remote work as the standard mode of work activity. A study by Randstad (2020) found that seven out of ten individuals express such interest.

In Spain, while still relatively low, the proportion of women engaged in telework has increased compared to pre-pandemic levels, with 8.3% of women and 7.7% of men working remotely by the end of 2021. Post-pandemic, a hybrid work model is preferred by a majority of workers, with 53% in Spain opting for some days of telework per week and 16% choosing full-time remote work. In 2023, 14.6% of employed women worked remotely compared to 13.1% of men. The percentage of teleworkers is highest among individuals aged 35 to 44 years (16%) and those aged 25 to 34 years (15.3%), with the lowest ratio observed among workers aged 55 to 64 years (10.9%) (ONTSI, 2022).

According to the latest data on the digital gender gap, 92.8% of Spanish women aged 16 to 74 use the Internet at least once a week, slightly below the usage rate of men. However, Spanish women outpace the European average in Internet usage by 4.7 percentage points. Regarding digital skills, Spain ranks fourth in Internet user skills within the European Union, with a score of 65.5, exceeding the EU average by almost 13 points (ONTSI, 2023b).

Concerning the structure of employment, in Spain male teleworkers are predominantly highly mobile employees and self-employed, while a larger proportion of women telework from home, often in suboptimal conditions and in lower-ranking positions within companies (GONZALES AND GARCIA-DE-DIEGO, 2022). Most worrying

¹ Share of people working remotely in Spain in 2022, by gender, Statista (2022) <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1200128/population-able-to-work-from-home-spain-by-work-schedule/>

² Statista (2022), <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1287671/penetration-remote-work-spain/>

disparities persist in the incorporation of female specialists into technical professions due to barriers such as unconscious bias and gender stereotypes rooted in traditional patriarchal values (CURULL ET AL, 2024).

Methodology

To gain a deeper understanding of the issue of how women experienced and perceived telework, we followed a qualitative approach that encompassed 15 in-depth interviews with female workers and 15 specialists. The participants were employees who have been working remotely from the beginning of the pandemic and experts who deal with issues of labour and gender on a daily professional basis. All interviewees identified as heterosexual, white women and cis-gendered women. Participants were recruited via various methods: snowball sampling, personal invitation and an expression of interest in participating in the qualitative part of the study after answering the online questionnaire. Fieldwork was conducted between February and June 2023. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the authors' institution. Interviews were conducted via Zoom and recorded in full. Before the study began, its aim was explained to all participants, whose names have been anonymised here for confidentiality. The interviews commenced only after oral consent had been obtained. The duration of the interviews ranged between 30 and 60 minutes. Female workers were asked about the impact of the remote mode of work on their professional lives and career development and how they had managed to reconcile their professional and private lives while working distantly. Experts were asked about the disruption of work due to the pandemic and the extensive growth of teleworkers in Spain and its probable impact on the quality of labour life of Spanish females as well as on future talent discovery and further support. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using the computer software MAXQDA. Qualitative coding was used to analyse the collected data (Charmaz, 2006), and seven final categories were identified. For the purposes of the study, we will focus on three categories: constraints of telework, inclusion into corporate work being remote, difficulties of promotion.

Individual perceptions of workers: inability to corporate culture inclusivity

Upon telework, time becomes a most important resource due to the intention to manage professional duties and domestic workload. Frequent lack of an immediate familiarity with new ways of performing professional activity, as new software becomes a necessary tool for virtual communication and delivery becomes a part of an employee's

concern and duty. Confronted with choices concerning how to allocate their limited time between their various professional duties efficiently, those of our interviewees who had caring or family obligations unanimously stated that just keeping their work was the priority. However, the absence of a clear understanding of career development came at the cost of their research productivity and personal well-being (HIRSCHI AND KOEN, 2021). Maria is a Spanish graphic designer in an IT company. She is 44 years old and lives with her daughter, who is 19, and her elderly father. Her account illustrates the burden imposed by the carework and the impact it had on her professional mobility and growth.

My main worry is to pay the bills . . . so I have to keep this job at any cost. . . Contrary to common sense, remote work takes a lot of time in preparation and understanding how the software functions, so I can't say that I am very productive. However, every time I want to ask a colleague or a supervisor from the office to help me . . . I feel a fear that I will be badly evaluated. Thus, there can be no talk about promotion.

– Maria, Graphic designer.

The certain exclusion of employees from the corporate environment, and the obscurity of communication with colleagues and managers require extra efforts to create a mood of self-motivation, as well as a stable mental well-being. This situation is time-consuming and, most significantly, prevents women from dedicating themselves fully to work. Daniela has a fixed-term content creator contract. She is 35 years old and has full custody of her toddler son. In the following excerpt, Daniela explains how she manages her motherhood and professional activities with an attempt to be a part of a team:

We have WhatsApp groups with colleagues, which is still complicated today, because I have 140 colleagues . . . and they send messages to the group non-stop...so that the useful information about work gets lost . . . They send stickers with good mornings, and the worst days are celebrations . . . I receive tons of congratulations. . . I was managing all that and trying to be nice with everyone; but being not in the office means that sometimes I simply can't get the necessary data as some colleagues delay responses to email . . . And I can't keep calling them. We have a weekly ZOOM meeting with our department, and the supervisor asks us on our personal affairs that we could share our

lives with each other but it is still not enough that our teamwork would get to be effective.

- Daniela, content creator.

If women focus on working exclusively remotely, it also relates to a personal perception of what was the most important consideration for them in such an unparalleled situation. The decision of women to work from home is, however, neither naïve – nor was it free of frustration. Amid a culture of metrics and audits, our interviewees in precarious positions, such as Daniela, reported being aware of the impact such decisions could have on their careers, even though managing both home and professional chores together were their priority. Conversely, it seems that it was not very clear to our interviewees how their constant intention to work remotely might eventually affect their personal well-being (HENKE ET AL, 2022). As dissatisfaction with invisibility and career stagnation grows and gets to be distressful, the desire to switch the job appears more and more frequently – as narrated by Tereza, a 46-year-old mother of two teenagers who is in a heterosexual relationship. Tereza is Spanish, she is an accountant in a local middle-sized company. She describes how inability to progress professionally leads to an active search for another job.

Numbers, reports . . . and tax revision, my workload is huge. However when it comes to promotion or to getting an extra, it is always someone else in front and frequently it is a male colleague. Initially I was accepting it. But my desire to feel myself recognized at work was never put aside, accompanying so many company accounts, especially those with tax exemptions, this was my priority . . . And last year I again didn't get any promotion. . . I sent an email to say that I was very frustrated, but my manager didn't even respond . . . so currently I am looking for a new job where my contribution can be evaluated with more respect.

– Tereza, accountant.

Tereza's statement shows that women feel unrecognised and underestimated if they don't observe a gradual career evolution, even being ready to solve any kind of challenge they might possibly face. Her account also discloses the relationship between satisfaction of professional status and the institutional inability to receive a proper recognition. The incapability of most companies to offer adequate and transparent

career plans to respond to employees' aggravated by the understanding of a certain gender gap leads to the situation of personal distress and loss of talents by companies.

Although we have so far talked about the difficulties to maintain a benevolent career evolution while teleworking, the quotes above raise some questions about the extent to which this situation is solely telework-related or is driven by other factors. Given that the weight of traditional ideas about gender in Spain is still prominent, women are still raised to be patient and unquestioning (RODRIGUEZ-DEL-PINO, 2019). Hence, our interviewees' distress about difficulties to get promoted might also relate to gender labour dynamics operating in Spanish society, in which women are deemed to be main care providers and frequently temporarily or part-time workers. Our data do not allow us to clearly affirm the main drivers behind the process or to determine to what extent such drivers are interwoven; however, we can state that, independently of the mode of work (remote or presential), this obvious distress and the lack of adequate company response and support within neoliberal labour market enable women to be exploited in terms of their career stagnation and rejection of recognition (BYTTEBIER, 2022).

The expert opinion on that reflects that telework itself is taken mistakenly as a conciliation measure and even though it might give women a certain time benefit, it becomes an additional element of gender gap:

Remote work limits a worker into a working function with no reference to working relationship as an employee is at a distance from the rest of the working team and supervisor. Women tend to have a slower pace of career advancement and the remote mode of work makes it even more difficult to grow professionally and eventually may bring a lot of consolidated distress and disappointment. This way, telework might become an additional stone for women to disclose their professional talents.

- Purificacion, Professor of sociology of labour.

Practice of telework - related segregation and discrimination

When asked about the opportunities of promotion, Tereza refers specifically to men being more recognized. Moreover, she resents not being able to engage to the same extent with her colleagues as those who work in the office:

I think a positive aspect [of the work on-site] was the greater contact with the team . . . , especially with the managers I already knew, who were available physically during the working day . . . I am sad when I think of my new colleagues who entered after I was transferred to telework, because I have never met them in person, I've only seen [them] via Zoom, most of them don't turn on their cameras . . . so I don't know them well. It's sad for me and also influences the working process and commitment.

Alejandra is a 36-year-old Spanish woman who lives with her husband and their three children. She is a business development consultant. Like Tereza, she describes ambivalent feelings towards working remotely:

My biggest concern is being apart from the team . . . because we [teleworkers] have to adapt to and nobody is prepared for working continuously with people whom you have never seen . . . also, it is a part of my job, but sometimes it can consume my day to explain a colleague something small via emails and calls that in real life I could explain in 5 minutes. . . Some processes do go very well, especially those that do not involve many people . . . and with a previous small talk. . . we would spend some time on this, we even decided to have more meetings so every two weeks, we would have three meetings instead of two . . . but this also required more time, virtually being remote means more work.

– Alejandra, business development consultant

This apparent contradiction – high volume of professional demands versus greater contact with colleagues as negative and positive aspects, respectively – resembles the taxonomy of work-related emotions and perceptions for women identified by Afota et al (2023). Afota et al. look at female workers' responses in responding to performative requirements– home, professional, family, societal ones – despite the stress, frustration and exhaustion involved in doing so. In a similar vein, the complex entanglement between necessity to spend more time at home and to have a connection with team and management in order to develop professionally ensnares women in a trap of contradictory feelings towards their role as women, mothers, wives, colleagues, subordinates. In the context of telework, especially induced due to the pandemic, and despite the stress and exhaustion reported by women as a result of a double burden and a coincidence of working and living space, such women also experienced a feeling of

being segregated and undermined as professionals. For Byttebier (2022) in spite of being effectively employed, alienation from the team also fosters feelings of badness and moral inferiority. This destructive power of dissatisfaction, as Byttebier (2022) termed it, is also central to comprehending why inclusion and promotion is so important for female teleworkers.

Experts being asked on the issues of segregation and discrimination coupled with telework for women, notice the following:

There is a clear tendency of feminization among teleworkers as more and more women initially look only for telework, implying that it is the right way for them “to keep eggs in one basket” meaning managing all the chores in a given period of time. However, it has to do with the new modern edition of keeping women at home and making them less visible. The culture of being present physically at work which is historically very strong in Spain virtually meant that men could leave the house and go to offices to unite other men. If there is a strong trend of women working from home and men again being in the office, it is a clear vector to new feminised sectors and lower quality of work for women.

- Sofia, Professor of labour law.

Mental health and the cost of career stagnation

By acknowledging that women’s daily dedication to family and working duties may be multi-faceted, we expose the complex relationship between labour and satisfaction. Furthermore, this eternal family-work entanglement can simultaneously inspire demotivation to any professional activity and escalate emotional discouragement. Lucia is a 42-year-old Spanish woman and works as an internet marketing specialist. She is single and takes care of her teenage daughter. The long excerpt from her interview, which follows, discloses how being a female teleworker with no clear understanding of how to proceed with a career is more than just a problem of a certain employment:

It did have an impact on my mental and emotional state . . . Every time a colleague . . . gets a bonus, we received a notification with their name, saying that the employee contributed extensively to the company, so I would look to see the record of this worker to see what was so special about him, because I also want to be noted in a certain way . .

. but such a search always makes me upset as there is never a clear idea of why employees get promoted . . . and I am working from home is in a certain isolation questioning myself on that. . . they're people who are part of our environment even if we never met them, . . . at least for me, because I don't know how to work any other way. Even being apart, they're part of my life from Monday to Friday – so if they get bonuses or promotions, I keep asking myself what I am supposed to do to get it as well. . . of course . . . it affected me. It couldn't be any other way. I'm human, I do my part, and I want it to be noticed somehow.

– Lucia, internet marketing specialist

Lucia talks about how, for her, career stagnation is also about self-estimating and she sometimes feels her job is like struggling with difficult circumstances in her private life. Demonstrations of authentic merit and recognition for employees' professional accomplishments are a first step towards resisting neoliberal ethics at work and creating a responsible community in which both company and employees show mutual motivation and share responsibility for the production process (ALEXANDER, 2023). However, as the author argues, it also requires deep, intense and laborious investment. Considering employees' feelings is circumscribed by manager's personal life in a way that might compromise one's emotional availability and professional skills, so recognising limitations to human factors is fundamental to building a comfortable environment enabling a space for career growth (Stamolampros et al, 2023). Given the additional pressure placed on teleworkers by mode of work in relation to the technical aspects of remote work, as well as the demands of their own private lives and their personal fear and anxiety, female workers being usually burdened twice as much as men are in need of managerial attention. However, despite being aware of neoliberal ethics of productivity by any means, most of our participants had not been prepared to stagnate so long in the same position:

I had two major problems . . . One was that I was a project coordinator; the other was that I had many international colleagues. . . . the project was going slower than expected initially, partly because of problem of communication with the office, and international colleagues were sometimes lost – I mean, they didn't understand English or Spanish pretty well, they working hours did not coincide with ours, a software didn't work well in their countries, and that was very emotionally heavy for me . . . at the

beginning, I started having panic attacks and I actually had to take medication . . . So when it came to a gratification time, I received zero. And next year again nothing, like I was forever in a black list...

– Leticia, Project manager

Leticia is a 52-year-old Spanish woman who is married to a Polish man and has no parenting responsibilities. Like Leticia, many female workers who have never previously experienced any kind of mental distress, reported being emotionally affected by telework and inability to grow professionally (YARBERRY AND SIMS, 2021). As a childfree woman, Leticia's account illustrates how it is not only employees with child-caring responsibilities who experienced emotional despondency due to the stress they faced during the pandemic (EUROFOUND, 2023). Women get to be overwhelmed by anxieties over an uncertain future, the safety of their employment and concerns over their professional well-being and career (GRAVEL, 2023). Upon the recent global health crisis, it is known that situations of uncertainty trigger psychological distress, while social isolation can increase the risk of loneliness and depression (Choi et al., 2020). While companies are extremely concerned with keeping qualified workers and productivity outcomes – asking employees to be more patient and flexible – almost no attention is paid to workers' own emotional distress (HENKE ET AL, 2022). As our participants stated, the impact of career stagnation on their well-being and mental health was tremendous.

Experts describe this situation being concerned that most enterprises do not have clear codes of conduct of teleworkers management:

There is a clear capacity that more and more people will telework in the nearest future. The disruption of contact with other colleagues can bring a high level of anxiety that later on can end up in a burnout that will have a direct impact on productivity. The capacity of the labour market to offer more remote jobs is a clear thing, but the question is how decent conditions of employment and professional advancement such positions can bring. No doubt that it is a positive tendency for females, however, it is possible to make the regime of telework more progressive, comfortable and adequate for all categories of workers meaning not leaving a space for uncertainties and voluntarism.

- Isabella, Professor of Human resource management.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The feminization of telework, stemming from the misconception that remote work facilitates the reconciliation of productive and reproductive labor for women, perpetuates the precarization of work and hampers women's advancement in the labor market. Initially positioned in more vulnerable roles, women often find themselves overlooked and unseen in remote work settings, leading to prolonged stagnation in their careers with limited opportunities for promotion and growth.

This cycle of stagnation contributes to a myriad of negative outcomes, including growing dissatisfaction among female workers, decreased productivity, mental health challenges, reduced purchasing power, high turnover rates, and, on a broader scale, the loss of talent for both enterprises and society. Moreover, it contributes to economic stagnation, as female workers are deprived of the means to contribute to consumption patterns.

To address these challenges, several recommendations can be proposed:

Implement Gender-Sensitive Telework Policies: Develop telework policies that explicitly address gender disparities and ensure equal opportunities for career advancement for all employees, regardless of gender.

Promote Transparent Promotion Practices: Establish clear and transparent promotion criteria based on merit and performance to mitigate the risk of gender bias in promotion decisions.

Provide Accessible Professional Development Programs: Offer professional development programs accessible to remote women workers, tailored to their specific needs and circumstances, to ensure equitable distribution of training opportunities.

Foster Inclusive Organizational Cultures: Create inclusive organizational cultures that value and recognize the contributions of all employees, irrespective of their work location, through awareness-raising initiatives and training programs on gender equality.

Monitor and Evaluate Gender Equality Efforts: Implement mechanisms to monitor and evaluate gender equality efforts in telecommuting, including the participation and advancement of women in the organization, to track progress and identify areas for improvement.

By implementing these recommendations, organizations can work towards mitigating gender discrimination in telework settings and promoting equal opportunities for all

employees, thereby fostering inclusive and equitable work environments conducive to sustainable growth and development.

Conclusion

This chapter enters into the debates about ‘telework’ and ‘career advancement’ in neoliberal labour market by exploring the ways in which female workers have to make compromises in their professional track, in the context of Spanish employment. While there is no doubt that being included into the labour market is central to female employment, gendered and personal expectations regarding what this engagement means are dissatisfying and upsetting for women, in spite of any attempt that working remotely might bring. In “careless” companies neither supervisors nor human resource management consider that female workers also need to be gratified gradually, and they are simply expected to intensively perform the labour needed for production (AFOTA ET AL, 2023). Our analytical choice to focus exclusively on women is supported by the understanding that gender gap so far is an intrinsic element of the modern labour market (GRAVEL, 2023). Thus, by looking at the experiences of women, we were not claiming that the stagnation of career exists only for women, nor that they represent a unified feminine (or feminist) standpoint (ALEXANDER, 2023). Our objective was to highlight the experiences of women in Spain with regard to their career endeavours as professionals in a post-pandemic time. Indeed, the existing literature on the impact of telework on employment offered initial evidence that males are also affected by the atypical jobs (EUROFOUND, 2023). Little is known in details, however, about how men deal with the growing emotional distress and unclarity of career advancement as teleworkers, a gap that requires future research. Adopting a broader understanding of career advancement coupled with telework (MORARU, 2022), our study also opens new investigative avenues to explore how the remote mode of work shaped career track strategies to navigate their professional responsibilities and expectations while being apart from colleagues and supervisors. Studies investigating the impact of the change of mode of work towards a remote one on women demonstrated how female workers found themselves torn between trying to create a perfect environment for conciliation of the double burden and a desire to be acknowledged as professionals, always experiencing a lack of recognition for any labour (WATSON, 2020). Our chapter adds to this debate by showing how women’s commitment to duties remotely can be linked to a

number of different consequences, including the disappointment with career stagnation and companies' gendered expectations of accepting less, the consumer culture of human resource management, the lack of adequate institutional understanding of gratification, frequent horizontal rotation of women in companies and a genuine commitment to solve life-family conflict.

In the case of Spain, given the gendered precarity in the labour market and the importance of career progress for motivation and productivity, for many women, the negative impact of feminization of telework might irreversibly compromise their careers. We are aware, however, that not all women were equally affected by the disruptions caused by the pandemic and the massive shift to telework that was maintained after the end of the sanitary crisis. The scholarship has shown that existing inequalities experienced by sexual minorities, racialised women, single mothers and mothers with disabilities are exacerbated upon new dimensions of segregation emerge (LANAU AND LOSANO, 2022). Thus, the lack of diversity in those sectors of work that can adopt telework reproduced in our sample is a key limitation in our findings. We agree that telework can constitute a path to conciliation and certain flexibility to many families. However, "the price" of such a path also encompasses a big volume of distress that can deplete women's well-being. Thus, the tendency of female workers to look for a necessarily remote job, without any clear understanding and instruction on how they can proceed with their professional development exacerbate their mental and emotional distress. Taking up Donnelly and Johns (2020) idea of an humanised human resource management, we argue that, when management is informed by an ethic of care that also considers workers' needs, and not by a unilateral expectation of productivity, employees are better motivated and empowered by the process instead of experiencing invisibility and feeling of being lost and abandoned. Professional work underpinned by an ethic of responsibility for employees is committed to alternative forms of professional interactions, transforming enterprises into a place of mutual success and growth (CEWINSKA AND STRIKER, 2023) instead of a marketplace. This allows for the creation of a true productive community supported by a network of reciprocal care, in which female workers' needs are also taken into account. As Trivedi and Patel (2021) argue, the creation of responsible and humanised professional communities through the creation of transparent working conditions for all is a way of resisting the pressures of work-life conflict. Employees, human resource managers and the healthy relationship

they are able to build together interact across a widespread social network, disrupting the neoliberal logic of private companies (SCHNEIDER, 2021). Hence, rather than being a task to be required by women, or a matter of individual practice, a benevolent quality of work should be a communal concern that involves governments, associations of workers and entrepreneurs as a whole in a run for female talents. We also acknowledge that it is a very complex endeavour to create transparent instruction of career advancement for companies that are profit-driven. In many situations, it may not be especially clear whether corporate responsibility measures are conforming to the expectations of employees, aiming to just keep their workers or provide a genuine support of their talents. Considering that the modern labour market tends to enforce precarious employment (GARCIA-PEREZ ET AL, 2023) and that spaces for other-centred tendencies are limited, this should not be equated to acceptance of low-quality jobs. Building on Hoskin and Whiley (2023) ideas of calculative solidarity in what is given, needs to be acknowledged, this growing tension between the appeared opportunity for a better conciliation and inability to fully disclose one's talent being remote worker undermines the possibilities of creating a more inclusive, flexible and productive labour market. At the same time, it reduces the idea of employment for women to the banality of being simply employed with no career (MEEUSSEN ET AL, 2020). Rather than minimising the importance of career advancement as a result of education and labour, acknowledging such complexity allows us to reflect on the effects of the advance of precarity and modern labour market logics.

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