

International Mobility of Women in ICT sectors: professional and personal goals, responses and outcomes.

Ana M. González Ramos
Núria Vergés Bosch
Cecilia Castaño Collado

Gender and ICT Research Programme
Internet Interdisciplinary Institute (IN3)
Open University of Catalonia (UOC)

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Introduction

Feminist Research on ICT shows the prevalence of a masculine culture within ICT sectors characterized by the scarce number of women in ICT studies and jobs and a skewed concept of excellence which makes work-life balance and the advancement of women in ICT difficult (Wacjman, 1991; Cohoon and Aspray, 2006; Castaño, 2008). However, most evidence about women in ICT treats them as a unique collective that conforms to general innovation trends of the contemporary society based on ICT development (Plant, 1997; Burger et al, 2007).

The present case study addresses the international mobility strategies developed by women employed in the ICT labour market in Spain. International Mobility is related to career progression in the contemporary economy, a knowledge based economy (Castells, 1996, Brown et al, 2001); therefore, highly skilled personnel, and in this case women in the ICT sector are impelled to go abroad.

Generally speaking, highly skilled personnel are moving because of training purposes, searching better professional opportunities or impelled by their companies and work institutions (Kofman, 2000, Hardill, 2004, Ackers, 2008). Notwithstanding we need to find out more information about causes and types of international mobility for women in ICT areas, as well as the consequences of mobility on their lives. Based on research outcomes, we sustain that although a primary cause of international mobility concerns to professional reasons, women are also motivated by personal ones. The women's life stories show a great heterogeneity of decision circumstances and expectations related to their mobility experiences.

From these observations, we obtain a baseline for advancing knowledge on the presence and retention of women in ICT professions. The question is to what extent mobility can be an agent of change for women and if it is a deliberate way to change their lives or if, inversely, it does not imply any changes for them. In fact, migration literature is still discussing the role of women in mobility decisions. According to this, many women still maintain tied professional goals to their partners, adopting a follower role in the whole

family strategy, but many others are becoming primary agents of their own professional and personal goals and, consequently, they are leaders of the family strategy.

This study provides evidence of different profiles of women in ICT pursuing different personal and professional objectives and decisions regarding international mobility. We want to explore to what extent mobility changes their identities or whether they use mobility to fulfill their dreams of an alternative future for them and their families. In doing so, we also explore the role of international mobility for women in the ICT sector, thus, their causes, responses and implications for the future of women lives and the development of the ICT sector itself.

Theoretical approach

Regarding the role of women in mobility strategies, literature has centered the discussion on two basic aspects. In the first place, female mobility concerns to the role of women in international mobility flows, and particularly when they are engaged and have a family. Traditionally, scholars have stated that women hold a subordinated position in respect to their partners because male careers are valued most by society (Mincer, 1978; Ackers, 2004, 2005; Shauman, 2010), which causes women careers to be delayed, slowing down their career trajectories and even forcing them to drop out. According to these authors, married women abandon their professional aspirations as a consequence of a prolonged period of unemployment that finally encloses them into housework duties and the care of children and partners. According to this, female trajectories are tied to male careers following the breadwinner model, and even in other models of family as a consequence of a job shortage in the labour market of the host country.

On the other hand, scholars indicate that international mobility is currently shaped by a more equal relationship in dual career's households since women hold similar jobs and career expectations than their male counterparts. Women would command professional decisions, even the mobility decision, if they hold successful jobs or they are more likely to have future job opportunities (Green, 1997, Hardill, 2004). International mobility empowers women making their personality stronger, as women usually feel more self-confidence in personal and professional terms. As some scholars have said, international assignments provide a depth of experience that develops leadership abilities (Gregersen et al. 1998, Mendenhall 2001 and Benson and Pattie 2008).

In contemporary societies, equal relationships emerge from traditional types of family where women were treated as inferior. Indeed, relationships are strongly linked to economic values which have transformed the traditionally gender roles in couples. Therefore, the partner who takes the lead in the major decisions between couples would be the one who has obtained the higher professional acknowledgement or gets on the higher wage.

Another research topic is focused on the impact of mobility strategies through the all evolution of women's career. This topic addresses the effects of the meritocracy, where one of the most valuable criterion is the international mobility- in the advancement of the highly skilled personnel and, particularly, in the scientific careers. Promotion in scientific institutions is supposed to be neutral because it is based on objective and accumulative criteria of excellence. However, the feminist approach underlines the negative

consequences on female careers, due to the structural inequality of the workplaces and the masculine model of progression for highly skilled professions.

Conversely to men, women have greater difficulties for developing a linear and step by step career developed successively over time. Standard criteria of progression are more difficult to pursue for women, who generally find more obstacles to hold a lineal career, regular and non interrupted career (Bagilhole and Goode, 2001, Hardill, 2004, Lyon and Woodward 2004). If criteria of evaluation ignore this situation, it creates the structural difficulties for women. Feminist scholars claim the adoption of a gender perspective in the scientific institutions in order to reduce these inequalities. As a pre-requisite to progress in professions, women have to move abroad, despite the fact that living abroad is more complicated for women with small children or non-comprehensive partners. It means that female careers depend much more on the individual commitments with their partners, family and workplaces, while our institutions continue ignoring those situations.

At this point, two questions emerge about international female mobility. The first one is the need to focus on the role of leading women as decision makers. The second one is referred to the personal and professional changes that women undergo because of international mobility. Our results suggest this experience bears on the women's personality, their professional career and even their families' lives. Then, it seems that international mobility is a funnel to progression and enhances social changes.

Design of the study and methodology

According to Crompton (2001) successful case comparisons depend on the theoretical selection of the cases themselves. For the purposes of our research we consider nationality, occupation and family heterogeneity as a base for the analysis. Besides, in order to understand women's motivations to go abroad in the first place and the circumstances around their mobility decision, we need to pay attention to the national status and direction of the mobility, the length of it, the sector of activity, and other relevant issues concerning family and care: above all, the marital status and having children or other dependants.

Our research focused on 16 interviews of women involved in the ICT sector in Spain who were selected according to the conceptual framework and the hypothesis¹. We carried out long and in-depth interviews to discover the motivations and reactions that involved their decision to move abroad, as well as the details of the mobility plan. Moreover, we collected some relevant information regarding unexpected episodes that they faced while living abroad. As we can check in our study, the mobility is a long term process where each event implies new decisions and challenges that need to be faced by those women. Mobility projects could be temporary at first, but some of them become permanent, in other cases couples could be broken as a consequence of living in different places. Therefore, causes of mobility are such as important as the following events along their life course. During all their experience abroad, their personal and professional circumstances might change, which brings to a transformation of women's attitude in a long term towards their lives (Hanson 2010).

¹ Although it is not the aim of this article, we also interviewed the partners of these women as part of the global project titled *Flows of Human Resources in Science and Technology: Searching the Talent* with the support of the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (CSO2009-09003).

Professional goals and family purposes are entwined in female careers in a greater extent than in male careers, because men are strongly oriented to professional development but women are in blurred roles between both personal and professional spheres. A set of questions related to personal and professional dimensions were in-depth chattered. Aspirations, promotions and obstacles to regular careers comprise the first topic; partners, children, family issues and the decision plan comprise the second topic.

It is worthy to note that all women interviewed are in regular status in Spain where they work legally even if they came from no-EU countries. It is a relevant dimension of our research, thereby they hold a certain status, legally and professionals. This situates them in a more advantageous position than similar nationals with lower skills. Some of these women worked for a long time in Spain, where they came because they had certain family rights (for example, Latin American women with Spanish relatives) or because they developed a training program in a Spanish university at an early stage of their careers. All these situations provided them a regular status in the host country despite they could be held an irregular condition in a while (for example, if student permits was over and they could not find a job). In consequence, none of them were illegal at the moment of the interview nor underemployed because of the regulative criteria of the host labour market. However, some of them had experienced some difficulties and slow down career as a consequence of the shortage in the Spanish labour market related to scientific activity.

The categories used on the qualitative analysis were related to their mobility experience as professionals, partners and mothers. According to previous results, mobility experience is an intense experience (Mahroum 2001; Kofman 2001; Urry, 2007; Favell 2008; Ackers 2008; Raghuram 2008) where movers would be decisively transformed, not only professionally but personally, even in their identity and feelings.

Correspondingly, the purpose of this paper is to determine the influence of the mobility in the female professional and personal lives, examining:

- The role of women in the decision making process, proving if they adopt an active or passive role with respect to the mobility project
- Facilities and/or obstacles to professional development by mobility compulsory mandate in highly skilled personnel.
- To examine resources for supporting mobility according to a gender perspective.

The mobility strategies are tailored by the previous contexts of women

Each mobility project corresponds to the particular contextual circumstances for women. In the first place, structural factors determine the conditions of the mobility strategy, for instance, nationality, legal support and facilities at the entrance to the country. Moreover, other factors concern to the social and employment environments of the movers, such as social class, skills and occupation of the workers, correspondingly with the opportunities of the labour market in the host country. Thirdly, there are several factors related to the partners' profiles and the existence of children, which are managed in different manners. These factors depend on the facilities of work-life balance and the childcare services in the host country. And finally, it strongly depends on personal orientation and the way in which women manage their career and mobility strategy. According to all these dimensions,

women schedule the sequential steps of their career and personal growing, included family building, trying to fulfill both purposes.

Therefore, we consider these factors as influential conditions of the mobility strategy adopted by the women included in this research. As a consequence, we previously selected these women in relation to their country of origin for comparative purposes. For this reason, half of these women were Spanish, which provides information about the outflows of national highly skilled personnel. As we before mentioned, the other half were women from other nationalities that developed a significant part of their careers in Spain. These women provide information about the inflows of highly skilled workers.

Among the non Spaniards, the majority of them were Latin American and the rest were from Eastern Europe. This regional distribution reflects trends of global migration in Spain because of historical and economic reasons. In the first place, Latin America and Spain share common roots that link both countries in several ways including colonialism, and historical flows among both continents of highly skilled personnel (Acosta et al 2003). In the second place, economic reasons are behind the migration from Eastern European countries. In recent times, as a consequence of the impact of the deterioration of their national economies, highly skilled personnel have been impelled to move to the Western and even the Southern Europe. These people work as professors in universities or researchers in public and private institutions in Spain.

The length of mobility is also considered as an essential variable of analysis (Mahroum, 2001; King, 2002; Ackers, 2008). It defines the type of connection created between the home and host countries because of the mobility process. Likewise, the length of mobility is related to the motivations to go abroad and it configures the profile of the movers. For instance, shorter mobilities require lower resources for living in a host country, specifically in terms of legal status and residence. Students and researchers mobility is sometimes constricted to a relative isolation in the higher education or research institutions as a exclusive environment. It means that they live in the host country even if they remain totally integrated in their native culture. On the contrary, longer mobilities suppose a new socialization in the host country and new residence permits and legal status as workers.

In this regard, women interviewed in this study were representative of both long and short term mobilities, which provide valid information for comparison purposes. According to their profiles, Spanish women tend to developed short-term mobility strategies derived from a compulsory criteria of evaluation in the Spanish academia. On the contrary, women with long term mobility strategies seem to be motivated by new projects in the host countries as a consequence of the paucity standard of living in their home countries. In such a way, they were stirred by economic and job expectations at the same time.

Most of these women could be certainly seen as successful professionals: in some cases it is clear because they hold high positions and responsibilities in ICT companies or research institutions or because they are self-employed and managers. Other women enjoyed a relative success in comparison with other women, nationals and migrants, with lower skills because they were in middle position of their careers and enjoyed better life styles. None of these women were forced to drop out their highly skilled career. They opted to alternative occupations in the same ICT sector as a consequence of personal preferences and job opportunities. This is the case of one Cuban engineer who worked in an ICT company as a marketing consultant because she disliked the technical work of engineering.

The type of workplace shows different patterns of mobility conforming the context where is developed. Business enterprises usually provide some facilities for making easier the mobility assignment of their employees; however, researcher institutions rarely set up these kind of benefits, therefore, they access them by applying to competitive mobility grants. These grants give support to individual scientists ignoring their family situation and circumstances regarding to the social environment of the movers.

According to She Figures (EU, 2009), European women are concentrated in the public sector, whereas they are a minority in the private labour market. This general assessment corresponds with the work sector of the women interviewed. Whereas four of them were employed in large private companies and one was self-employed, most of them were employed in high education institutions or were PhD candidates. The public sector, and particularly universities, seems to be preferred by highly skilled women because of maternity benefits and more friendly conditions regarding work-life balance. In this regard, three of these women developed a non linear career trajectory, shifting from the private to the public sector coincidentally with the maternity period and a new place for living. Therefore, they move geographically and also between sectors as a consequence of a better personal expectation within the public sector.

As we mentioned before, mobility is related to some characteristics concern to social and family environments. Marriage and children would stress the obstacles or opportunities to move abroad or, in any case, make different the mobility strategy. Then, it is relevant to take into account the family environment of the women interviewed. In our population, four women were single and without partner while they were living abroad. Although the age of these women has been considered as decisive point, some women explicitly explained that mobility was a personal election regarding getting married or having children. Moreover, two Latin American women were involved in a homosexual relationship and, at least one of them confirmed that the election of the place was motivated by open sexual rights of the hosting country.

Notwithstanding, most of these women were married when they decided to go abroad and they had some children during that time. In fact, some scholars have stated that dual careers households could be easier the mobility of the whole family because they share similar commitments (Hardill, 2004; O'Neil and Bilimoria, 2005). Most of the women in this study were married to other scientists or engineer, showing a high level of endogamy among highly skilled personnel. This engagement practice is more usual when there is special social closure: in this case, they are part of the same professional group and share similar workplaces and labour conditions. Moreover, the endogamy seems to point out towards an unconsciously women's strategy of selecting partners in order to be benefited by a relationship linked to more comprehensible and supportive colleagues. If they share similar objectives and life styles women should better balance professional and personal goals.

The interviewees reflect a broad spectrum of life strategies, in professional and personal spheres, where mobility was pointed as a crucial event. The circumstances created and caused by the mobility process lead their narrative discourses and our analysis to show the heterogeneity of profiles and the slightly changes provoked by the new life style in the host countries.

Accordingly to the depiction before mentioned, women movers take part in diverse strategies depending on their professional objectives as well as their personal circumstances. Therefore, professional purposes are behind the international mobility but they are also very influenced by social ones. Women manage their professional aspirations taking into account the previous expectation of the others around them: their families and partners, even their friends, workmates and extended family. Subjective and social values influence in great extent women's strategies along their life course related to professional issues, and international mobility is not an exception: Women express deep concerns on work-life balance rather than do their male counterparts² because men are mainly oriented to professional purposes, avoiding family issues that are traditionally responsibility of the women. On the contrary, professional women, particularly if they have children could not separate professional and personal issues that easily.

A tentative classification of women with international mobility experiences

In the last decades, women hold more active roles in the highly skilled labour market as a consequence of their increasing participation in higher education. At the same time, workplaces have been slightly transformed as a consequence of the new ethic of work and values regarding excellence that benefited women workers as well as the introduction of ICT. Some policies regarding work-life balance, such as teleworking and distributed work, blur the concept of working time and place, and the new life style has shaped personal lives, work and leisure values. Although both women and men could be benefited by that, this has been crucial for highly skilled women as we can see in the following section.

For instance, younger couples have closer aspirations because they work in similar areas, their families share more democratic values than before, and they can live in more equal relationships. As a consequence of these changes, the presence of women has increased in the high skilled labour market although some old-fashion values persist in workplaces, family and social institutions, in a broad sense. However, the problem is not the amount of women who are in the ICT sector, but how much harder will it be for women to work in such a male dominated workplace?

According to the results of this research, a diversity of contexts shapes the international mobility and the aftermath events regarding professional and personal lives during their life course. We have been established three main profiles of women movers in order to describe their role in the decision making process of mobility referred to as leaders, dual trackers or followers.

Leaders are women who command their mobility strategies according to their professional or personal purposes. However, leader women show different profiles and motivations. One first group is composed by young women at early stages of their professional careers who travel alone for learning purposes. These women improve their skills and abilities abroad and accommodate their lives according to the new place or maybe towards a permanent free mover life style (Favell, 2008). In general, this profile is more likely oriented to live abroad than continuing their life in Spain, because their new colleagues, friends and networks are stronger abroad than in their home country. In opposition, their

2 In the interview of their partners, men express lower feeling about their families, showing minor interferences of private lifestyle in their professional careers.

ties with the home labour market are broken and, consequently, the return becomes more difficult as time goes by.

A second group of leader women bring their couples and families with them. This group is comprised by several profiles: university professors, business managers or researchers in the middle or senior stage of their professional careers. The mobility is caused by the business strategy of the multinationals or global enterprises where they work. Or, in other cases, it is related to the acquisition of new jobs or education credentials, which even allows them to go back to their home country if they wish so. These women and their families benefit from the childcare services in the host countries, in such a way, women are allowed to balance work and family lives in the host country. Moreover, these women and their families are upper and middle social class which provides more resources to get care services and to socialize in the host country than for other low skilled migrant women. The job of their partners become a complicated issue if they do not share the same sector or workplace, just like in the case of women followers but gender reversed. Usually, their partners also have the opportunity to enjoy an international assignment and they move at the same time or later. In some cases, both partners are separated for a while as a consequence of the mandatory international career.

A third group of women leaders is composed by those women coming from developing countries or poorer ones, consequently, they move as a deprivation situation, real or perceived, in their home countries. They feel that their skills were undervalued in their home countries or that their standard of living was being deteriorated. In some other cases personal reasons, such as sexual orientation, impel them to leave to be able to freely enjoy their sexuality as well as getting better job opportunities. Some others think that mobility could be deserved wealthier opportunities for their children. And consequently, they decide to move together with their whole family. Therefore, professional advancement is not only the cause of the international mobility but women want to raise the living standards of their whole family.

Thus, the profiles of these women leaders on the international mobility show that they are very diverse regarding objectives and reasons of their strategy (such as length and place of destination) and personal subjectivity which is related to their lives. A common feature among these women is that they play an active role in the mobility decision making. However, they also present great differences in their attitude, and the evolution of their careers and relationships.

In spite of changes in life styles, women remain subordinating their professional purposes to the family issues. For instance, women involved in definitive strategy of mobility argued that the decision was motivated by the family well-being, because in the new place they would enjoy higher opportunities. In the case of the temporary mobility experiences, women argued that mobility was good for children because they learnt much more and knew other cultures. Somehow it seems that younger women and childless are concerned about children and international mobility because they foresee obstacles and threats to their life styles and professional purposes.

Another relevant aspect of these women is regarding the evolution of their lives as a consequence of the mobility and identity transformation. They state that the most important advantage of mobility was the experience to live abroad alone, and in consequence, they grew up in a way that they will be open-minded and empowered. All

these evidence sheds light of the strong attitude of these women. Despite, some women suffering relationship ruptures and they fight abroad to bring up their children, these women are an example of determination. The self-employed woman is included in this group and she decided to lead their own business in the host country to work in a creative work that she wanted to develop. To sum up, the international mobility experience transformed their lives in a decisive manner and, somewhat it provoked a real change in their personality and life style.

The dual trackers profile is composed by women with partners in similar professions, circumstance that leads the international mobility and the professional purposes simultaneously. Their professional advancement was similar and the mobility decision was a commitment of both partners. Partners who comprised this category used to be in parallel careers to the women in terms of success or failure; if one of them was clearly successful, the height of the decision would tend to be associated to this successful partner.

For women involved in this double tracker profile to pursuit professional aspirations seem easier because their partners are searching the same goals. They negotiate the place and time of their destination. Moreover, they can use the double support received by grants and afford better conditions to the cost of moving abroad. Not only in professional terms but also in personal and family terms mobility is easier for these women because they can reach a consensus with their partners and share similar responsibilities at home and workplaces.

This profile is more common among scientists. Senior couples usually planned the international mobility in the early phases of their career for training purposes (doctoral or postdoctoral degrees) when they did not have any children. Thus, when both partners held a permanent position and had small children, they were able to develop shorter periods of mobility. However, the importance of mobility along the entirely scientific career has transformed this pattern of the younger couples. In the present, it is more usually to go abroad at several moments throughout the career, in whatever stage of their professional career and with or without children because they are not considered a hindrance. Some younger couples decided to go abroad even if they did not have a permanent position and had small children. The maternity delays are not caused by the mobility itself but for professional and training reasons.

When these highly skilled couples had children abroad, they used the childcare service in the host country. These women criticized family policies focused on the care of children exclusively by women as part-time work, as well as policies that encourage along period of parental leave for women. In their opinion, these measures have a side effect on women careers delaying their promotion in workplaces. They preferred a greater offer of nurseries and longer open hours for primary schools that would allow them to progress in their careers whereas the children are growing up. On the other hand, it is a common opinion to consider that in Spain and other Southern European countries, the childcare is supported by other relatives, as grandparents often do. However, women interviewed affirmed that they did not either receive the support of these relatives in Spain because their grandparents live too far or in other places.

Another relevant issue relates to the positive perception that these women have about the public sector. The high participation of women in this sector is linked to the good opinion that they have of it, considered a friendly environment for women. In the public sector the

standard criteria of evaluation are clearer and fairer than in the private sector; moreover, workload and pressure are lower than in the private sector; and, finally, it launches work-life balance measures which are preferred by women with children. As we mentioned before, that was the reason why some women moved from the private to the public sector considering family issues.

The third profile, called follower women, who abandon their professional career despite their high level of skills, because they move abroad impelled by their partner's professions and, as a consequence, they subordinate their aspirations to the male counterparts. This profile used to be common in the past, when the breadwinner model was the regular one. But, this model is disappearing by the stirring demand of knowledge in the economy which attract more diverse workers, and the decision of women to enter into the labour market as highly skilled personnel. Maybe, the main difference to women workers in the past in comparison to current workers is that they search a successful career, not only as a complementary support of their families. Likewise, women workers of the past decades got a job for supporting their families and rarely where searching jobs only for professional purposes; however nowadays, women workers in contemporary societies are strongly oriented towards their own professional career.

In any case, this type of profile is not clearly represented among women interviewed in this study. The ICT sector holds some of the most demanded jobs in the knowledge economy and the labour force of highly skilled personnel is high appreciated. The most representative case among the women interviewed is one woman involved in a double career household who followed her husband abroad when she got a job in the private ICT sector, such as she had done in Spain. Despite of what it might seem she is not a clear example of an abandoned career because she opted to follow him for pragmatic and professional reasons rather than familiar and subordinated one (O'Neil and Bilimoria have mentioned for similar cases 2005).

In summary, international mobility provides a professional challenge to highly skilled personnel implying a new life style in professional and personal terms; therefore, it opens up a challenging road that contributes to women strength, self-esteem and empowerment. If women are accompanied by their children or the whole family, then the members' family also will be benefited by the mobility assignment. The incorporation of women in the ICT sector gives them new opportunities as they move around the world freely. International mobility experiences provides them with highly confidence; whose feelings command their future lives in different ways. This change is not exclusive to women who develop definitive mobility; on the contrary, short-term mobility is clearly a new stir for women as their professional aspirations would be transformed. Even if they have suffered hard situations, they were reinforced of that with more self-confidence, especially if they were leaders or dual trackers which are the most common cases among highly skilled women in ICT.

Balancing international mobility with personal and professional environments

Despite the advantages that international mobility might provide to women in the future, they still have to struggle with several obstacles. The design of the professional career is still based on "neutral" criteria of progression that, in fact, reflects the traditional male careers ignoring more complex circumstances that involve women careers, thus without

considering the “employee as a whole person” (European Union 2010: 163). In this section we attempt to address problems associated to international mobility from a gender perspective and, likewise, we explore some actions that would contribute to a greater equity.

The primary obstacle for women’s professional advancement comes from the organisation of the scientific institutions and workplaces themselves. Those are still dominated by a traditional working culture based on a unique model of career, where male employees were centered on their work, and the female workers were restricted to subordinated and non-creative jobs for being centered in the family. The increase of highly skilled women has not changed the workplaces or the social values (Aaltio and Mills 2002); women hold different roles in male-organizations and think that hard work is the way to reach top positions without any additional support (González Ramos 2010).

Women advance, even when they face adverse circumstances regarding institutional barriers, gender stereotypes, social values or personal constrictions. In their own words, they find out solutions to daily problems and they are sure that their own efforts balance work and lives spheres in the best way. Women rarely consider their social environment or institutional constrictions from a collective action perspective. In fact, private decisions constitute the strategy composed by every woman.

A cooperative partner makes easier the life course of these women in professional and personal terms. Some women have been benefited by the push of their partner to move because they did not go out alone or because they got support in a new job. Likewise, a supportive partner provides emotional, which is one of the most important dimensions for the advancement of the women according to Haines and Saba (1999) and other kinds of support needed for professional challenges such as domestic support that helps to reach work-life balance.

On the other hand, two of women interviewed became divorced after they moved abroad, which is a significant event in their lives³. The broken relationship played an important role in relation to the mobility process because the rupture happened after they went abroad. These women present great differences on their lives and mobility strategy. For instance, one of them was a Latin American woman involved in a definitive mobility strategy with the whole family; whereas, the other woman was a Spanish University professor who planned to go to the US alone for a temporary period. They explained that mobility increased or made other personal problems more evident but it was not the first cause of the split. Anyway, after that, their lives were deeply changed, shifting personal and professional decisions. The design of their careers as well as their decision about partners and children was modified by this mobility event. And, moreover, they continued their lives in a different way with their children, in the first case, or alone, in the second case.

Regarding to professional orientation, values and particular circumstances yield different roles among highly skilled women. Some of them are strongly oriented to achieve higher professional positions despite environmental constrictions: partner, family, social values, regulation and norms of progression in workplaces. Otherwise, women would adopt a mixed role, conciliating leisure or family issues with professional purposes. The double

³ We found no case of divorce or any family problem after a mobility process in male interviews.

position of women in society makes them to develop both strategies at the same level and time. Mobility experiences are a part of a whole trajectory of professional careers designed by organisations under male parameters.

The higher professional expectations of women may influence other personal decisions. Childlessness is an alternative for some women who consider that “all is not possible” (Hertz, 1986) and, consequently, they delay the maternity or they do not even consider having children at all. However, the international mobility and the development of professional careers are not always related with not having children. As we before mentioned, most of women go abroad with their children to develop an international career, combining supportive partners and nannies with schools and even online facilities in order to not lose any important event in their children's lives. Moreover, as we have shown, mobility strategies might be planned to give greater opportunities to their children as well. Anyway, the childcare is customized depending on the offer available and the preferences of family. Abroad, care conditions are different and difficult to get as non nationals, although most women explained that they easily adapted to the childcare facilities to the host country.

Despite all this, why mothers do not think that mobility is a real problem? In the first place, they have a positive opinion about the influence of mobility on their children. In the second place, their social class facilitates the accommodation of the whole family. And, in the third place, these women manage the same type of problems in their home countries because they often are internal migrants even in their home country.

Therefore, women are in a burden position at home and workplaces. Their professional and personally functions are mixed and, likewise, women combine traditional and innovative strategies to face multiple problems. Sometimes, they claim new spaces and roles into familiar and professional issues, although they also adopt traditional roles. In a changing world their strategies are very diverse according to their profiles and attitudes. Notwithstanding, they seem more inclined to transform personal circumstances than institutional barriers.

Furthermore, international mobility paves the way for highly skilled women and their constrictive environments. Women involved in the ICT sector are pushed by the demand of the labour market to go abroad, and they are attracted by countries with wealthier conditions for them and their families. As Czarniawska and Sevón (2008) suggested, in the past, women had reached certain relevant position in male culture because of their migrant position. According to that, some relevant women had definitively over passed ancient values because they adopted a double stranger position: as women in a masculine profession and a male environment, and as foreigner. Social constrictions are overcome because other places are creating more employment opportunities and a friendly environment to female careers.

Final Remarks

In these work we shed light on the life course of women involved on ICT professions focusing the aim on the influence of the international mobility in their lives and careers. These data suggest that mobility is an advantageous experience that influences their lives in multiple dimensions. In the first place, since international mobility is related to the

acquisition of knowledge and skills, viewed as a training process, it equipped them to achieve higher positions in the ICT professions. Indeed, as the ICT sector operates demanding highly skilled workers, women take a great advantage moving easily to other places and fulfilling their aspirations. In the second place, international mobility is likewise a primary cause of female empowerment, because it involves crucial changes in their lives. To face those new challenges they get self-confidence and a positive attitude and experience to face daily problems as well as more serious ones regarding professional and family issues.

A second conclusion from this work states the importance of taking women as a diverse collective, who show different profiles and attitudes regarding professional goals, mobility and children. Women delve a particular strategy for fulfilling criteria of promotion at work and struggling their professional and personal objectives in public and private spheres. Women are not a homogeneous collective and consequently, we need to carefully pay attention to their demands, trying to give a response according to their attitude and circumstances of work and family. On the other hand, two basic dimensions should be addressed for resolving the most serious obstacles regarding female progression and mobility: a) legal and regulative norms present at national and institutional levels, and b) the mismatch between work culture and family values regarding women roles.

Obstacles to the mobility are primary related to legal issues because migration policies are restricted to specific quotas regarding nationalities and certain groups of skilled workers. In a global economy, it is nearly impossible to stop the free movement of the highly skilled workers, although the well-being of the migrants is affected by regulation restrictions. This is particularly serious in the case of women with children or when women are followers of their partners' careers. Even when legal permits seem resolved, some aspects need our attention in order to make easier living in foreign countries for them. Large companies are inclined to give support to the highly skilled workers considering the "whole person" and their family circumstances. However, most of research institutions do not consider this global comprehension of their employees and offer limited support to them as a whole. As conclusion, we affirm that the female talent is wasted because of remaining gender inequalities.

In contemporary societies, highly skilled women are incorporated into the labour market; however, some women are still playing the same traditional roles than in the past. Blurred limits define the female responsibilities corresponding to professional and personal lives. This is a result of a changing scenario where women, partners, colleagues and bosses could play a different role depending to their personal goals. In this sense, women adopt different roles depending on their personality and the most likely rate of success (or maybe level of satisfaction, depending on their main goals). On the other side, men increasingly take diverse professional and personal roles depending on their global objectives and personal attitudes. This complex game of men and women roles in contemporary society is a result of a slightly transformation where changes are not completely adopted.

In this regard, gender policies are necessary to compensate structural and institutional inequalities; moreover they take into account the complex situation resulting of a changing model. The provision of facilities oriented to fit gender policies should be designed according to the heterogeneity of women workers. For example, women with a mixed orientation to work and family prefer policies based on part-time and work-life balance; however, on the contrary, women strongly oriented to professional goals prefer childcare

services with longer open hours. Likewise, women without children are free to travel any time and anywhere but women with family prefer destinations that provide strong support for their family.

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