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Supporting Mothers Back to Work: Experimental Evidence on Employment, Fertility, and Child Outcomes

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Abstract

Many advanced economies face persistently low fertility alongside rapid population ageing, raising concerns about economic sustainability and demographic balance. Addressing these challenges requires both sustained labor market participation among the working-age population and conditions that support childbearing. These objectives place women, and particularly mothers, at the center of the demographic debate, as motherhood remains a key turning point in employment trajectories and family formation. Using experimental evidence from an intervention targeting mothers who curtailed employment due to childcare responsibilities, the paper finds that improving work–family reconciliation can support mothers' labor market reintegration, promote investments in existing children, and, under conditions of greater stability, strengthen fertility desires.

JEL classification

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work, motherhood, family friendly policies, fertility desire

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1 Introduction

Over the past decades, OECD countries have experienced a sharp and persistent decline in fertility rates. The average number of children per woman has fallen well below replacement level in almost all of these countries, while life expectancy has continued to increase steadily. The combination of sustained low fertility and rising longevity has led to rapid population ageing, giving rise to what is often described as a *demographic winter*. This process raises major concerns regarding economic and social sustainability. A shrinking cohort of working-age adults is increasingly required to sustain economic activity and welfare systems, producing goods and services, contributing to tax revenues, and financing pensions and social spending for a growing elderly population. In this context, it becomes crucial that individuals of working age participate effectively in the labor market and do so in a productive and continuous manner.

A central dimension of this challenge concerns female labor market participation. In many OECD countries, and particularly in Southern Europe, women's employment rates remain substantially lower than those of men. Enabling higher female participation is therefore essential not only from a gender equality perspective, but also to strengthen the overall labor supply. At the same time, this objective must be pursued in a way that does not further depress fertility. On the contrary, in a context of persistently low fertility, it would be desirable for improved employment opportunities and higher household incomes to support, rather than hinder, childbearing decisions—provided that public policies allow for effective work–family reconciliation.

The demographic and economic literature has extensively documented that motherhood represents a critical turning point in women's labor market trajectories. Employment penalties associated with childbearing, the so-called *child penalty*, vary substantially across countries but remain pervasive even in advanced economies. Recent estimates by Kleven et al. (2025) show that the employment loss of women relative to men following the first child amounts to about 38.2% in Spain, 40.7% in Germany, and 33.5% in the United Kingdom, while it is substantially smaller in Denmark (14.1%) and in North America (25%). In Italy, a country characterized by both low fertility and low female labor force participation, approximately one in five women leaves her job after becoming a mother (Save the Children, 2024). Similar patterns are observed in the United States, where 16% of new mothers stop working and 9% strongly reduce their labor supply by moving into part-time employment (Lu et al., 2017).

Parental leave and early childcare policies—by far the most widespread and extensively studied interventions—have been shown to facilitate women's return to work shortly after childbirth (Olivetti and Petrongolo, 2017). However, a sizable share of mothers exits the labor market or sharply reduces their labor supply for extended periods, well beyond the end of statutory leave, and remains largely outside the scope of these policies. For this specific and numerically important group of women, empirical evidence remains scarce, and only a limited number of studies analyze policies explicitly designed to support labor market re-entry after maternity-related interruptions

(see, among others, Doerr (2022)).

From a theoretical perspective, this study draws on both neoclassical economic theory—which frames fertility decisions as the outcome of a trade-off between the benefits of children and their opportunity costs, particularly in terms of forgone earnings—and the theory of the Second Demographic Transition, which emphasizes shifts in social norms and gender roles. Since the 1990s, the relationship between female employment and fertility has changed substantially: in countries that have invested in reconciliation policies, women's labor market participation is no longer negatively associated with fertility and can coexist with relatively higher birth rates (Ahn and Mira, 2002). More recent contributions further show that stable employment and adequate income are key determinants of fertility choices, especially when couples perceive economic security and are embedded in a policy environment that enables work–family compatibility (Alderotti et al., 2021; Vignoli and Guetto, 2025).

This paper contributes to this debate by evaluating the impact of *Equilibri*, a program implemented in Northwestern Italy in 2023–2024. The program targets mothers with minor children who report having stopped working or substantially reduced their labor supply due to motherhood, but who express a desire to return to work. *Equilibri* is based on an individualized mentoring intervention: each participant is supported by a case manager who helps define employment goals and the steps required to achieve them, while providing access to job-search activities, empowerment initiatives, and reconciliation-oriented services.

A distinctive feature of the program is its explicit focus on the family dimension and on children already present in the household. *Equilibri* aims to replace part of maternal care time with high-quality time for children by promoting participation in extracurricular activities—such as sports, arts, and educational workshops—which may foster child development while also facilitating work–family reconciliation. Through mentoring, the program supports women in developing their own reconciliation strategy by expanding the set of available tools and resources: training, job search and job change, adjustment of working hours, access to more secure employment, information on reconciliation services, and opportunities for children's activities.

Thanks to a randomized controlled trial with delayed entry, this study evaluates the effects of the program on a broad set of outcomes: employment and job quality, fertility desires, investments in existing children, and a range of secondary outcomes including job satisfaction, perceived stress, and gender norms. The paper's main contribution lies in its focus on a crucial life-course stage—mothers who do not return to work immediately after childbirth—a situation that is common in many advanced contexts. The Italian setting provides a particularly relevant case study. Italy combines low female labor force participation, very low fertility, a large gap between desired and realized fertility,[1] limited reconciliation policies, and a strong reliance on the family of origin for childcare and economic support (e.g., grandparental care and financial help for housing). Ma-

[1]See Brzozowska and Beaujouan (2021) for a discussion of desired and realized fertility across selected European countries using Generations and Gender Survey data.

ternity leave is relatively short, and childcare services are not universally available. In this context, innovative policies such as *Equilibri* offer a valuable opportunity to assess whether targeted and multidimensional interventions can simultaneously support employment, family well-being, and demographic outcomes.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on the effects of active labor market and reconciliation policies on employment and fertility decisions, with a particular focus on the crucial period of motherhood, the specific target population of the project. Section 3 describes the *Equilibri* program in detail. Section 4 presents the data and the empirical strategy. Section 5 discusses the main results while Section 6 concludes.

2 Literature Review

The literature is organized into four main strands. The first examines the evolution of women's labor market trajectories around childbirth, distinguishing between immediate effects of motherhood and medium- to long-term adjustments in labor force participation and work intensity. The second strand studies the impact of active labor market policies on female employment, with particular attention to programs that facilitate mothers' re-entry into the labor market after care-related interruptions. The third strand analyzes the effects of work–family reconciliation policies on fertility. The fourth relates to other outcomes considered in *Equilibri*, beyond employment and fertility. In particular, we examine the effect on participation in children's extracurricular activities (attendance being one of the program's objectives), as well as on job satisfaction, life satisfaction, and gender-related outcomes—additional dimensions that may have been influenced by the program.

2.1 What Happens at Childbirth and in the Subsequent Years

A large body of research documents that the birth of a child represents a critical turning point in women's labor market trajectories. Using sequence analysis on women's careers in the United States between 1996 and 2012, Lu et al. (2017) show that post-motherhood employment trajectories can be grouped into distinct clusters. A substantial share of women exits the labor market entirely (approximately 15 percent), while another group—particularly relevant for this study—experiences a sharp reduction in work intensity, transitioning to part-time employment (about 9 percent). The analysis reveals marked socioeconomic heterogeneity: both the poorest and the wealthiest women are more likely to leave the labor market, albeit for different reasons, and labor market exit is more frequent among White women than among non-White women. Research on the impact of parenthood on mothers' labor market outcomes in Italy shows sizable and persistent child penalties. Casarico and Lattanzio (2023) study the short- and long-run effects of childbirth on mothers' labor market outcomes relative to non-mothers using matched employer–employee data. They document a long-run child penalty in annual earnings of about 52 log points, largely driven by reductions in

weeks worked. The penalty is particularly pronounced among younger and low-wage mothers, those taking longer parental leaves, and women employed in small firms with less generous pay structures. More recently, Biasi and De Paola (2025) analyze child penalties for both mothers and fathers in Italy using administrative data and an event-study approach. They find that childbirth negatively affects only mothers' earnings, while fathers' earnings remain largely unaffected. When maternity leave benefits are included in earnings, the child penalty for women nearly disappears in the year of childbirth. Nevertheless, despite the important role of leave policies in cushioning short-term income losses, a substantial earnings gap between mothers and fathers persists, reflecting deeper structural and cultural factors shaping gendered labor market trajectories.

A crucial dimension emerging from this literature concerns the structure of working hours. A growing body of evidence shows that schedule flexibility is a particularly valued job characteristic for women, and even more so for mothers. Banerjee et al. (2025) document that the ability to adjust working time and arrangements plays a central role in women's job preferences, often outweighing monetary compensation, as it allows women to maintain labor market attachment while reducing work–family conflict.

In the absence of flexibility, returning to work after the birth of the first child becomes significantly less likely. Ishizuka and Musick (2021), using U.S. data for the period 2004–2008, compare employment before and after first birth among women employed in jobs with rigid schedules—where hours cannot be reduced below 40 per week—and women in more flexible jobs. They find that women facing strict hour constraints are significantly less likely to return to work, indicating that it is not childbirth per se that reduces employment, but rather the incompatibility between work schedules and care responsibilities.

Policies that facilitate labor market re-entry through reductions in working hours represent a direct response to these constraints. De Quinto and González (2025) analyze the short- and long-term effects of a Spanish policy that facilitated mothers' return to work by allowing reductions in working hours for parents of children aged 0–6. Using administrative data from 1990 to 2020 and exploiting a discontinuity generated by a 1999 reform, the authors show that the policy increases the likelihood of returning to the labor market. However, potentially ambiguous long-term effects emerge: for some population subgroups, part-time employment becomes persistent, raising concerns about the consolidation of low-intensity career trajectories and limited advancement opportunities.

As children grow older and enter compulsory schooling, direct childcare costs decline and, in principle, mothers could increase labor supply. However, constraints related to school schedules remain salient. Shure (2019) studies the effect of a two-hour increase in daily school hours in Germany, introduced by a 2002 reform that extended the school day until 3 p.m. Using a difference-in-differences design, the study finds a positive effect on labor market entry among previously non-employed mothers, but no increase in working hours among those already employed. The reform thus succeeds in reactivating some mothers, but does not affect overall work intensity.

Partially different results emerge from other institutional contexts. Felfe et al. (2016), exploiting

variation in school schedules across Swiss cantons, analyze the extension of school hours for children aged 4–12. They find an increase in full-time employment and a reduction in part-time work among mothers, without inducing additional labor market entry. The observed change therefore mainly concerns the distribution of working hours rather than extensive-margin participation.

Other studies document yet different effects. Dehos and Paul (2023), evaluating the expansion of after-school programs in West German primary schools—whose allocation was determined exogenously by federal funding—find no significant effects on either employment probabilities or working hours. However, they show that mothers use the freed-up time for non-market activities, including housework and personal time. In contrast, Berthelon et al. (2023), analyzing the shift from half-day to full-day schooling in Chile between 2002 and 2009, find large positive effects on mothers' employment, labor force participation, and hours worked. These effects are particularly strong among low-educated women, suggesting that the impact of school schedules depends critically on the socioeconomic context and available labor market opportunities.

2.2 Active Labor Market Policies and Female Employment

Alongside reconciliation policies, a substantial strand of the literature examines the role of active labor market policies (ALMPs) in improving women's labor market outcomes. ALMPs include training programs, employment services, hiring subsidies, and support for entrepreneurship, and stem from persistent gender gaps in labor markets in terms of participation, unemployment, and career continuity.

The main objectives of women-targeted ALMPs include reducing gender employment gaps, improving skills and employability, and facilitating re-entry into the labor market after care-related interruptions. Vocational training is one of the most common instruments. However, systematic reviews show that standard training programs yield, on average, modest effects on women's employment and earnings. A meta-analysis of 30 interventions in low- and middle-income countries finds average increases of 11 percent in employment and 6 percent in income (Chinen et al., 2017).

Larger effects emerge when training is combined with complementary components such as life-skills training, mentoring, or internships. Similarly, job search assistance and job-matching services—generally less costly—tend to produce positive short-term effects, particularly by reducing informational and network barriers faced by women.

A specific strand focuses on ALMPs promoting female entrepreneurship. Programs that combine business training with financial support or mentoring show more encouraging results than training alone. Chinen et al. (2017) document a 73% increase in the likelihood of self-employment when training is paired with grants or coaching, along with smaller but positive increases in sales and profits.

Overall, the evidence suggests that ALMPs can improve female employment outcomes, but with substantial heterogeneity across program types, contexts, and target groups. Meta-analyses cover-

ing large sets of evaluations indicate that only about one-third of estimated effects are statistically significant, while job search assistance programs tend to be more effective and cost-efficient than traditional training in the short run (Card et al., 2018; Yeyati et al., 2025).

A particularly relevant contribution for this study is Doerr (2022), who evaluates a German vocational training voucher program targeted at women returning to the labor market after an interruption of at least 12 months. Using propensity score matching on administrative data, the author shows that six to seven years after voucher receipt, treated women are more likely to work full time, less likely to be in precarious employment, and more likely to earn at least as much as before the interruption.

Other two related studies focus on Italy and analyze active labor market interventions targeted at highly vulnerable populations. Del Boca et al. (2021) evaluate a conditional cash transfer program combined with mandatory mentoring courses, while Del Boca and Pronzato (2024) study a multifaceted program providing individualized support in employment, training, and family-related domains. Despite differences in design, both studies find that positive employment effects are concentrated among men, with limited or no significant impacts for women. These results highlight that, in contexts of extreme socioeconomic vulnerability, persistent care responsibilities and structural constraints may limit the effectiveness of even comprehensive active labor market policies in improving women's employment outcomes.

2.3 Policies, Employment Conditions, and Fertility

A parallel strand of the literature examines the effects of reconciliation policies not only on employment but also on fertility decisions. Hart et al. (2024), in a systematic review of causal studies, document robust evidence of a causal relationship between childcare availability and fertility, positive effects of major parental leave reforms (but not of marginal extensions), and temporary effects of cash transfers.

Girsberger et al. (2023) study the introduction of a 14-week maternity leave paid at 80 percent of earnings in Switzerland in 2005. Using a difference-in-differences design, they find limited effects on employment, but a higher probability of having a second child, concentrated in areas with high childcare availability and among women employed in family-friendly firms. This suggests that the fertility effects of reconciliation policies depend strongly on the broader institutional environment.

Wang and Tan (2024) show that access to flexible work arrangements in the United Kingdom between 2010 and 2022 is associated with a higher probability of having children, particularly when both partners—or the woman—have access to such arrangements and when the division of domestic labor is more balanced. Guetto et al. (2025), using a laboratory experiment, show that the effects of individual policies on fertility are very small, while what matters most is the availability of a coherent policy package, in which public childcare appears to be a necessary but not sufficient condition.

A more recent strand of the literature shifts attention from the quantity of policies to the quality of employment. Vignoli and Guetto (2025) contrast a pronatalist approach, focused on direct financial incentives, with a structural approach aimed at improving living and working conditions. Meta-analytic evidence from Alderotti et al. (2021) shows that employment instability reduces fertility, particularly when associated with low income and the absence of a stable partner, with especially strong effects in Southern Europe. Similar conclusions are reached by Laß et al. (2025) for Germany and Australia.

Using data from China, Yan et al. (2025) show that the perception of having a decent job—characterized by security, respect, and recognition of skills—positively affects fertility intentions, both directly and indirectly through a reduction in perceived work–family conflict. Nieto (2022) finds that in Spain policies incentivizing the conversion of temporary contracts into permanent ones increase the probability of childbearing, reinforcing the role of economic security as a key determinant of family formation.

2.4 Other Relevant Outcomes

Finally, the paper also speaks to research investigating the role of policies directed to extracurricular activities as *Equilibri* includes, among its work–family reconciliation measures, the facilitation of extracurricular courses for the children of participating mothers. Existing evidence shows that extracurricular activities and summer programs for children, when well coordinated with parental work schedules, can extend mothers' potential working day and foster children's non-cognitive development (Meroni et al., 2022). Second, improvements in mothers' working conditions induced by the program may affect job satisfaction and work-related beliefs, which are crucial for sustaining labor market attachment. Indeed, job quality—measured in terms of schedule predictability, absence of overtime, and career prospects—plays a central role in maintaining continuous participation in the labor market (Aum et al., 2025). Moreover, the internalization of more egalitarian gender norms, potentially fostered through mentoring activities, is associated with more continuous labor market participation and improved sorting into jobs that better match women's preferences and skills (Görges, 2021; Rafols, 2025).

3 The Program

Equilibri is a program designed for mothers of children under 18 who have reduced or stopped working due to maternity. The primary need of the beneficiaries is to find employment or improve their job situation, achieving a new "equilibrium" where work and family life are more compatible. Additionally, the program seeks to offset reduced maternal time with children resulting from increased labor market participation by offering high-quality developmental activities. The program operates in three different areas of the Piedmont region in Italy, with consistent goals and similar

methods across all locations: in a mountainous region (Val di Susa), a suburban area (Settimo), and the small city of Biella. Despite each of these areas facing its own unique set of challenges and weaknesses, they all share a similar labor market characterized by low level of female participation.[2] Women were informed about the opportunities offered by the programs and its conditions through local agencies collaborating with institutions operating in each area.

The primary service offered to all women in the program is the support of an advisor (case manager). The first step involves an introductory meeting where the woman discusses her specific personal circumstances. The case manager's role is to work with the participant to identify activities that will help her improve her situation and move toward her goals. A first type of activity involves identifying opportunities already available in the area: registering with the employment office, enrolling in professional courses offered by the Region, seeking support from dedicated offices for tax returns, and accessing psychological support centers in case of mental health issues affecting the couple or their children. Other activities have been specifically designed and organized within the program and are, therefore, accessible only to women enrolled in it (unlike the previously mentioned activities). These include regular meetings, some with more structured content (such as CV writing workshops), while others focus on social interaction with other adults. The aim is to provide an opportunity for women to share their experiences regarding work, family situations, challenges, and possible solutions.

Similarly, local activities are made available for the children of these women (for example, summer camps), with support provided to inform and facilitate their registration. Additionally, specific activities are organized for the children, consisting of recreational and artistic sessions running parallel to the activities planned for their mothers.

After the initial meeting, the case manager and the beneficiary remain in contact through follow-up meetings, calls, or even brief phone check-ins, as needed. Even after the beneficiary leaves the program—whether due to starting in a new job or being satisfied with her work-life balance—the case manager continues to reach out for a few months afterwards.

Given the characteristics of the program and the existing evidence in the literature, we expect the intervention to have positive effects on mothers' labor market outcomes. In particular, the program may increase both the probability of being employed and the number of hours worked, partly through greater participation in training and job-related activities promoted within the intervention. Greater attachment to the labor market, higher earnings, and improved economic stability may, in turn, strengthen fertility desires or, at a minimum, prevent declines in childbearing intentions. In addition, through the reconciliation services and support provided by the program, we expect children to have greater opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities, with potential benefits for their social development. Finally, by easing work–family constraints, the pro-

[2]According to data from ISTAT (the Italian National Institute of Statistics), the 2024 inactivity rate among females was 31.5% in the province of Biella and 32.7% in the province of Turin where Val di Susa and Settimo are located. The same figure for males was 22.9% in Biella and 20% in Turin.

gram may contribute to improved subjective well-being. Specifically, we expect higher satisfaction with work and work–family reconciliation, higher overall life satisfaction, lower perceived stress, and more egalitarian attitudes toward gender roles within the household and society. We expect treatment effects to vary by baseline employment status, the age of the youngest child, and partnership status. While the latter two factors are likely to shape the intensity of work–family reconciliation constraints, baseline employment status determines whether mothers face the challenge of entering employment anew, switching jobs, or expanding their working hours.

4 Data and Methods

Enrolment opened in March 2023 and remained open until December 2023. Mothers interested in the program were required to complete an online Google Form in order to gain access. The form could be completed by the women themselves or, if they needed support, at the institution where the program would be conducted. This baseline questionnaire collected basic information: work situation, number and age of children, presence of a partner, financial situation, personal contacts, and consent to participate in the evaluation study. Some of this information was part of the eligibility requirements for participation in the program: the applicant had to have at least one minor child and a family economic situation indicator (ISEE) of less than 30,000 euros.[3] For the latter requirement, they were asked to attach the relevant certification. A final question concerned the perceived level of stress due to balancing family and potential work commitments.

Each week the research team downloaded the application data, and within each location, randomized half of the applicants to the treatment group and the remaining half to the control group. Women assigned to the control group were contacted and informed that they would be invited to participate in the program at a later stage. 482 women signed up for the program between March 2023 and October 2023. 258 were allocated to the treatment group and 224 to the control group.[4]

The follow-up interviews for both treated and control women were conducted by telephone by a survey agency and took place 9–10 months after enrollment. The second questionnaire collects information on the outcomes of the program in terms of mothers' employment and training conditions, fertility, children's well-being and activities, and more generally on life satisfaction, stress, and attitudes toward gender roles. We focus on a series of 6 main outcomes: having taken any professional trainings, being in work, hours of work, desire to have an additional child, whether any child was enrolled in any extra-curricular activity and the SDQ peer relationship variable. The set of main outcomes represents the core aim of *Equilibri* which support the labor market re-integration

[3] An ISEE of €30,000 corresponds to a couple with two minor children, without home ownership, with a gross annual income of approximately €22,000 for the husband and €18,000 for the wife. In the case of a single mother under the same conditions, reaching an ISEE of €30,000 would require a gross annual income of around €27,000.

[4] In weeks where the number of women who applied to the program was odd we broke ties randomly by favoring program participation.

of mothers and the development of their children. We also report results for a set of 7 secondary outcomes in the Appendix. Our secondary outcomes include: being happy with their job, satisfaction with future career prospects, satisfaction with reconciliation between work and family life, life satisfaction, stress levels in a typical work day and two factors extracted from items on attitudes toward gender roles. We derive the two factors by applying principal component analysis on gender attitudes. The first factor captures participants' gender-egalitarian ideology, while the second captures attitudes toward women's economic independence; higher values on both factors indicate more egalitarian views.[5] We reproduce both questionnaires administered at enrollment and at the 9-month follow-up in Appendix B and C.

Table 1 report descriptive statistics for the sample of women at the time of application. The first column reports figures for the full sample. The women who applied to *Equilibri* are on average slightly below 40 years old. Approximately half have an educational qualification equivalent to a secondary school diploma, approximately 20% have a university degree, and the remainder have less than a diploma. Half of them were working when they enrolled in the program. On average, they have 1.68 children, with the youngest child being 6 years old. 62% live with a partner. On a scale from 1 to 10, the perceived level of stress for these women was 7.17. The ISEE level is divided into two classes (up to 15,000; between 15,000 and 30,000 euros): 30% of the women have an income indicator in the higher class. The socio-demographic profile of applicants matches the intents of the program which was designed to serve mothers with minor children who curtailed their participation in the labor market. We break down all descriptives statistics according to treatment status in column 2 and 3 and show balance tests in column 4. We report exact p-values, from randomization inference, in column 5. In line with randomization, all observable characteristics are balanced between the treated and the control group.

It is not straightforward, nor necessarily appropriate, to assess the representativeness of this sample of women with respect to Italian women with similar socio-demographic characteristics. Enrolling in *Equilibri* reflects a specific propensity to re-enter or reposition oneself in the labor market, a trait that is difficult to capture in standard survey data. Nevertheless, we can select a comparison group of Italian women with similar observable characteristics in terms of labor market attachment and presence of children, and assess whether there are relevant differences between the two groups. To this end, we use data from the Italian Survey on Income and Living Conditions (IT-SILC) and restrict the sample to women with at least one minor child who are either not employed or work fewer than 30 hours per week. Several characteristics are remarkably similar across the two samples. In the IT-SILC comparison group, 47% of women are employed (compared to 50% among *Equilibri* participants; Table 1), 41% have secondary education (versus 47% in *Equilibri*), and 23% hold a university degree (versus 18%). Some differences emerge in terms of age and family composition. Women in the IT-SILC sample are slightly older on average (41.9 years compared to

[5]To enhance interpretability we report in Table A.1 in the Appendix factor loadings for each survey item from the gender attitudes section of the follow-up questionnaire.

39.3), have a youngest child who is correspondingly older (8.9 versus 6.3 years), and report a higher number of children (1.83 versus 1.68). The most striking difference concerns partnership status. While 89% of women in the IT-SILC sample live with a partner, this is the case for only 62% of women participating in *Equilibri*. This contrast suggests that *Equilibri* disproportionately attracts women facing particularly complex work–family reconciliation constraints successfully in line with its intended design. The target group of the program lies in women who are especially vulnerable in terms of balancing labor market participation and family responsibilities.

About nine months after the initial randomization, between December 2023 and early September 2024, the women were contacted by the survey agency for a follow-up interview and, regardless of the interview outcome, control women were subsequently invited by the organization to join the program. 321 women have responded to the second questionnaire: 159 treated women and 162 control women. Table A.2 in the Appendix investigates the determinants of replying to the follow-up interview conditioning on having completed the baseline form. Our results show that the probability of replying increases with age, secondary schooling, living with a partner, having higher economic status, and experiencing more stress at the time of the interview. Given these characteristics, women in the treatment group showed a lower propensity to complete the follow-up interview. We replicate our descriptive statistics for the subsample that replies to the interview 9 months after enrollment in Table 2. We further show that the treated and the control group remain balanced in the follow-up sample.

To evaluate the impact of *Equilibri*, we estimate the following equation:

$$y_{k,i} = \alpha_k + \beta_k \cdot Equilibri_i + X_i'\gamma_k + u_{k,i} \tag{1}$$

Where y represents the outcome variables k for each woman i, $Equilibri_i$ is a dummy variable equal to 1 for women in the treatment group or 0 for the control group, and X_i represents the vector of control variables at the time of enrollment (age, level of education, number and age of children, presence of a partner, employment status at baseline, level of stress and level of income indicator). All models include strata fixed effects as individual dummies corresponding to the geographical areas where the program took place. The term u denotes the residual. We compute p-values from randomization inference and estimate linear probability models across all binary dependent variables. Across our secondary outcomes we discretize several categorical variables measuring happiness and satisfaction over different domains. We recode them as binary using as cutoff points the median value of the categorical variable computed in the control group. Because almost all individuals who replied to the follow-up interview complied with their assignment treatment status we interpret estimates from Equation 1 as the average treatment effect of having participated in *Equilibri*.[6]

[6]Out of the 159 women assigned in the treated group who replied to the follow-up survey all but 6 eventually participated in *Equilibri*. All 162 members of the control group were effectively excluded from the program until the follow-up interview.

We run a slightly different regression model when analyzing child outcomes which we observe in a child dataset. Specifically we run the child level equation below:

$$y_{k,c,i} = \rho_k + \delta_k \cdot Equilibri_{c,i} + X_c'\theta_k + X_i'\omega_k + e_{k,c,i} \tag{2}$$

Where y represents the outcome variables k of child c from mother i, $Equilibri_{c,i}$ is a dummy variable equal to 1 if the child's mother is assigned to the treatment, X_i represents a vector of mother characteristics (level of education, number of children, presence of a partner and level of income indicator) and X_c refers to child characteristics (age and gender). All models include strata fixed effects as individual dummies corresponding to the geographical areas where the program took place. The term e denotes the residual and we derive p-values from randomization inference where we account for clustering of children within mothers.

5 Results

Table 3 presents the main results of this paper. Across our main outcomes, we find a precisely estimated increase in the probability of completing any professional training (+9 ppts). The effects on the probability of being in work is instead small (+5 ppts) and not statistically significant while the estimated effect on the number of worked hours is positive (+2.37 hours) and statistically significant at the 10%. We find evidence of an increase in the probability of desiring an additional child +6 ppts, with the estimate being statistically significant at 10%. Regarding child level outcomes, we find a small, and imprecisely estimated, increase in the probability of a child participating in any extra-curricular activity (+7 ppts) and a small, statistically insignificant, increase in the peer SDQ relationship variable.

In Tables 3, we also explore further results for a series of secondary outcomes. Here, we find evidence of a statistically significant increase in the probability of being happy with a job and satisfied with life in our overall sample.

These results however mask important heterogeneities which we investigate in graphical form in Figure 1.[7] Throughout the figure we show the control mean in blue and the estimated treatment effect as an additional bar either on top or below the control mean. We distinguish statistically significant results from imprecise estimates by visualizing treatment effects using different colors.[8] We break down all our main outcomes by previous employment status, having a partner and the age of the youngest child in the household and report estimates for each main outcome as a separate panel. Results for professional training are broadly similar across the different subgroup breakdowns but for single women. For the average woman, the probability of participating in training nearly doubles, increasing from 9% in the control group to 18% in the treatment group.

[7] All results are reproduced in a tabular format in Table A.3 - A.5 in the Appendix.

[8] We colour code statistically significant estimates for p-values < 0.10 in pink and report statistically insignificant effects as dotted white bars.

However, for single women, the effect is substantially larger: the probability of participating in training rises from 4% in the control group to 15% in the treatment group. Our estimates for employment increase in magnitude and become statistically significant for single mothers and for households in which the youngest child is under age five. For single mothers, the probability of being employed rises from 55% to 79%, while for the latter group it increases from 58% to 72%. Turning to hours worked, we observe an average increase of about two hours per week in the treatment group relative to the control group, with mean weekly hours in the control group of approximately 30. This result is fairly homogeneous across subgroups, with the exception of mothers of school-aged children and mothers who were not employed at baseline for whom no effect is detected. This latter result is particularly noteworthy: among women who reported not working at baseline, 37% are observed to be employed at follow-up, with an average of 28 weekly working hours. Overall, labor supply appears to increase substantially over time, both among treated and control women. We then explore heterogeneity in treatment effects on fertility desires. The estimated effects are driven by women who were already employed at baseline—among whom we also observe an increase in working hours—and by those living with a partner. Fertility desires increase by approximately 10–11 percentage points, but only among women in relatively stable conditions when additional support to balance professional and family commitments is provided. Finally, we turn to child level outcomes. Regarding participation in any extracurricular activity, we find a positive and statistically significant treatment effects for children whose mothers were not employed at baseline and for children under five. In particular, among mothers with preschool-aged children, participation increases from about one in three children attending playgroups or similar activities in the control group to roughly one in two in the treatment group. For this same subgroup, we estimate a statistically significant increase in the SDQ peer relationship score, suggesting improved socialization with peers.

When we turn to the secondary outcomes, we find that the effect on life satisfaction is primarily driven by the subgroup of women who were not working prior to joining the program, for whom we observe an increase of approximately 23 percentage points. By contrast, the estimated effect is virtually zero for women who were already employed before participation. A similar pattern emerges for job satisfaction; however, these estimates are substantially imprecise due to the very small cell sizes involved. Interestingly, we also find evidence of an increase in the proportion of women reporting stress during a typical workday. This effect is particularly pronounced among women without a partner, those who were not employed before entering the program, and those whose youngest child is older than five. Finally, participation in the program is associated with an unexpected decline in the importance attached to women's economic independence, especially among partnered women and among women with preschool-aged children. We also observe a reduction in the endorsement of gender equality attitudes among women living with a partner. One possible interpretation of these counterintuitive attitudinal shifts is a form of collective nostalgia for the traditional figure of the stay-at-home mother (Jeannet and Terzuolo, 2025). Nostalgia—defined

as a sentimental longing for the past—is an inherently ambivalent emotion, generally more positive than negative, and deeply infused with social meaning, as it often refers to significant figures or formative life experiences (Sedikides and Wildschut, 2019). Drawing on focus group evidence, Jeannet and Terzuolo (2025) document how even highly educated, career-oriented women express nostalgic feelings when reflecting on the maternal figures of their childhood, such as their mothers or grandmothers. These reflections evoke memories of care, attention, and emotional presence that are perceived as lacking in their current lives. Importantly, however, when explicitly asked whether they would wish to return to those traditional arrangements, respondents express a clear and decisive rejection.

5.1 The Role of Activities

Finally, we explore the role of the various activities chosen by women during the program. Were some activities more effective than others? This is not an easy question to answer. Even if we observed a positive effect associated with a specific activity, we would not be able to determine whether this effect is due to the activity itself, the network created among participants, the discussions that took place, or to self-selection into that activity. Women make choices, and these choices may be driven by unobservable characteristics (such as pro-activeness) that also directly affect our outcomes of interest. A key advantage of the program's monitoring system is that it records the number of meetings with the case worker and the kind of activities for both the immediately treated women and the control group women who will participate in the program at a later stage. This allows us to compare treated women who selected specific activities with control women who will choose the same activities in the future upon entering the program. This comparison allows us to circumvent endogeneity concerns over the choice of activity. We classify the activities into four categories: (1) reconciliation (e.g., parenting support, access to local services) and (2) employment (e.g., job training, supply–demand matching, obtaining a driver's license), (3) empowerment (e.g., financial education, microcredit, motivational support), and (4) other activities (e.g., sports, mutual aid initiatives). Due to the small sample size and low participation rates in the last two categories, we focus only on women who took part in reconciliation activities or employment activities. Similarly, we split women based on the number of meetings they had with the case worker, analyzing treatment effects for the subgroups who had more meetings than the median number.[9]

Figure 2 reports the results. Similarly to our previous results, the effects for engaging in professional trainings remains similar across breakdown. The effect for being in work, instead, grows larger, and turns statistically significant, for women engaging more with their case manager and those participating in either reconciliation or work activities. The effect on hours of work, instead, is found to be statistically significant for women who choose work activities. This is the opposite with respect to fertility desires, with the estimated treatment effect doubling in size,

[9]In the follow-up sample the median number of meetings held within 9 months with a case manager was 4

compared to the overall sample, for the subgroup who attended reconciliation activities. Engaging with child activities instead, appears to be driven by work activities and suggest that these activities might have allowed mothers to have more time to engage more with their careers.

An important caveat to our analysis is that women self-selected into the different activities groups. While we are able to compare treated women who chose a given activity with a control woman who will choose the same activity once enrolling in *Equilibri*, the estimated treatment effect might still reflect a difference in socio-demographic composition compared to the main effect we estimate for the full sample. For example, it may be the case that younger women with younger children are more likely to participate in work–family reconciliation activities, but also more likely to desire another child (independently of their attendance in these activities). In order to disentangle these effects, we run a robustness check where we apply weights computed from entropy balancing (Hainmueller, 2012). Our weights are built to match the first moment of the following socio-demographic characteristics: Mother age, mother education, employment status at enrollment, number of children and household income. We reweigh each subgroup to present the full follow-up sample.[10] Table A.6 in the Appendix replicates our main results in the weighted data and confirms that our estimates remain virtually unchanged. How can we assess the role played by unobservables in driving these stronger results? If women were randomly assigned to activities, those in the control group at the time of the interview (i.e., before participating in *Equilibri*) should display similar attitudes and behaviors across activity types. While assignment is not random in our setting, we can observe attitudes and behaviors at baseline and examine who chooses specific activities. This allows us to identify the profiles of women who select certain interventions and for whom we might expect larger effects if the experiment were replicated under random assignment — or, for example, if a given activity were made mandatory. Table A.7 reports the main outcomes at baseline for women in the control group, distinguishing between those who later choose a given activity and those who do not. The pattern is rather clear: women experiencing greater difficulties in the labor market are more likely to opt into preparatory work-related activities and to engage more intensively with case managers, including attending a higher number of individual meetings.

6 Conclusion

This paper evaluates the effects of a reconciliation-oriented intervention targeted at mothers who reduced or exited employment following childbirth. We examine outcomes related to labor market participation, investments in existing children, fertility desires, and broader dimensions of wellbeing, paying particular attention to heterogeneity across groups of women. Overall, we find beneficial effects on labor market outcomes, job satisfaction, overall life satisfaction, and fertility desires. Importantly, responses to the program vary substantially across subgroups.

[10]We compute weights separately when analyzing data at the child level where we substitute mother age with the age of the child and then repeat all other socio-economic variables used for the main sample.

Among single mothers, the program generates a large increase in the probability of employment, rising from 55% to 79%, although this improvement is accompanied by higher levels of perceived stress. The strongest and most consistent effects are observed among mothers with children under the age of five. These women are more likely to enter employment, work longer hours, and enroll their children in extracurricular activities, with positive effects on children's peer relationships. For both groups, the results suggest that the main constraint prior to the intervention was the difficulty of reconciling work and family responsibilities, stemming either from the absence of a second adult in the household or from the presence of very young children. In the case of single mothers, the increase in perceived stress can be interpreted as a natural byproduct of greater labor market engagement under continued time and caregiving constraints. Another relevant subgroup consists of partnered women who were already employed at baseline. For this relatively less vulnerable group, we observe an increase in working hours alongside a marked rise in fertility desires.

At the same time, both mothers of young children and partnered women display counterintuitive shifts in gender attitudes, attaching less importance to women's economic independence and—among partnered women—expressing less egalitarian views on gender roles. This pattern is not only at odds with the stated objectives of the program, but also with the observed behavioral responses, as these women increase their labor supply. We interpret these counterintuitive attitudinal shifts as a form of collective nostalgia for the traditional figure of the stay-at-home mother, which does not appear to translate into actual behavioral changes. In the context *Equilibri*, treated women increase their labor supply while simultaneously expressing less progressive gender attitudes relative to the control group. We conjecture that this apparent inconsistency may be rooted in the program's social and relational components—such as group discussions and peer exchanges with other mothers—which take place during particularly demanding phases of life, marked by intensive childcare responsibilities and work pressures.

Another substantive and methodological contribution of this study concerns the role of the activities and case-manager meetings undertaken by program participants. A recurrent question in the evaluation of personalized interventions relates to the extent to which specific components of the program drive the observed effects. Women who select certain activities over others may differ systematically, for instance, in terms of motivation, intensity of needs, or time availability. Nonetheless, the design of *Equilibri* offers a valuable opportunity to shed light on this issue. Leveraging the randomized design with delayed entry for the control group, together with a monitoring system that follows both treated and control women once enrolled, we are able to compare outcomes of women who have already participated in specific activities with those of women who will engage in the same activities at a later stage. Exploiting this structure, we find stronger effects among participants who took part in activities related to employment and work–family reconciliation, as well as among those who had more frequent meetings with their case manager.

While we can rule out that the larger impacts are driven by observable characteristics, we also sought to better understand who these women are and what might make them more responsive to

the intervention. We find that women who face greater difficulties in finding employment are more likely to enroll in work-related activities and to have a higher number of meetings with their case manager. These findings suggest self-selection into program components based on gains. Women facing more severe employment constraints appear to actively seek out the forms of support most closely aligned with their needs. As a result, the stronger estimated effects for certain activities may partly reflect the fact that they are taken up by women with greater initial disadvantages — and thus greater scope for improvement.

Tables

Table 1: Summary Statistics and Balance Test

Variable	All Mean	Treated Mean	Control Mean	Diff. in Means	P-value
Age mother - Years	39.34	39.54	39.11	0.43	0.44
Working mother before treatment	0.50	0.48	0.53	-0.04	0.49
Educ mother: Less than diploma	0.35	0.37	0.34	0.03	0.60
Educ mother: Diploma	0.47	0.46	0.48	-0.02	0.72
Educ mother: Degree	0.18	0.17	0.18	-0.01	0.97
Income HH: High	0.30	0.30	0.29	0.00	0.99
Mother with partner	0.62	0.60	0.65	-0.04	0.37
Mother stress level	7.17	7.21	7.12	0.08	0.76
Number of children	1.68	1.66	1.70	-0.04	0.53
Age youngest child	6.25	6.14	6.38	-0.24	0.61
N	482	258	224		

Notes: The table presents descriptive statistics and balance tests for the sample of 482 women who applied to the program. P-values refer to randomization inference computed from permutation tests with 500 replications.

Table 2: Summary Statistics and Balance Test

Variable	All Mean	Treated Mean	Control Mean	Diff. in Means	P-value
Age mother - Years	39.80	39.83	39.78	0.05	0.92
Working mother before treatment	0.51	0.50	0.53	-0.03	0.63
Educ mother: Less than diploma	0.29	0.32	0.27	0.06	0.32
Educ mother: Diploma	0.51	0.50	0.52	-0.02	0.82
Educ mother: Degree	0.19	0.18	0.21	-0.03	0.56
Income HH: High	0.35	0.36	0.33	0.03	0.61
Mother with partner	0.68	0.67	0.69	-0.01	0.98
Mother stress level	7.39	7.40	7.38	0.02	0.98
Number of children	1.68	1.63	1.73	-0.11	0.24
Age youngest child	6.18	6.09	6.27	-0.18	0.69
N	321	159	162		

Notes: The table presents descriptive statistics and balance tests for the sample of 321 women who completed the follow-up survey. P-values refer to randomization inference computed from permutation tests with 500 replications.

Table 3: Treatment Effects on Main and Secondary Outcomes

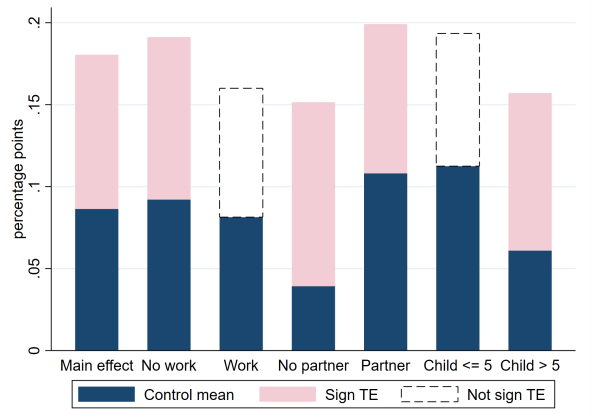
Panel A: Main outcomes						
	Professional training	**Is in work**	**Hours of Work**	**Fertility desire**	**Child extra-curricular**	**SDQ Peer relationships**
Treated	0.09**	0.05	2.37*	0.06*	0.07	0.19
P-value	0.01	0.24	0.07	0.08	0.10	0.28
Control mean	0.09	0.63	30.40	0.10	0.66	7.94
N	321	321	172	321	500	500

Panel B: Secondary outcomes							
	Happy with job	**Satisfied career**	**Satisfied reconc.**	**Satisfied life**	**Stressed workday**	**Factor 1: egalit. ideology**	**Factor 2: womens' econ. indep**
Treated	0.14**	0.10	0.02	0.11**	0.05	-0.17	-0.09
P-value	0.05	0.18	0.83	0.02	0.28	0.13	0.47
Control mean	0.58	0.53	0.51	0.61	0.55	0.09	0.04
N	175	175	175	311	321	321	321

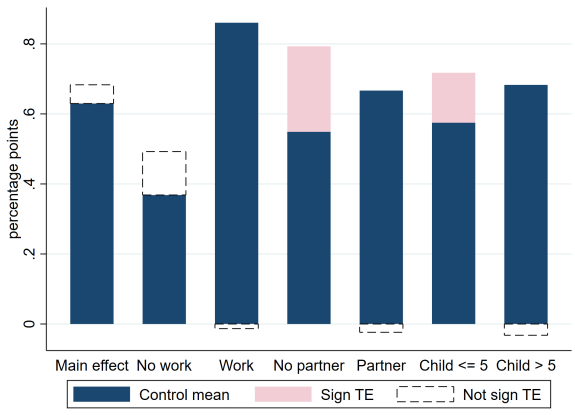
Notes: Panel A reports main outcomes, while Panel B reports secondary outcomes. For all secondary outcomes but those related to progressive attitudes, variables are transformed into binary indicators equal to one if the respondent's value is above the median of the control group distribution, and zero otherwise. Reported coefficients correspond to treatment effects from separate regressions for each outcome. P-values are obtained using randomization inference with 500 replications. All specifications control for mother's age, employment status, education, household income, partnership status, stress level, number of children in the household, the age of the youngest child and strata fixed effects. Child outcomes are estimated using the child-level dataset where we control for child age, gender, mother's education, household income, partnership status, number of children in the household and strata fixed effects; standard errors are clustered at the household level. Control means are reported for the comparison group. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Figures

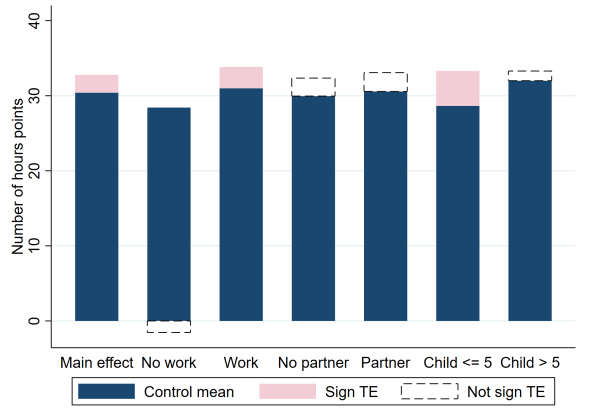
Figure 1: Heterogeneous treatment effects by subgroup



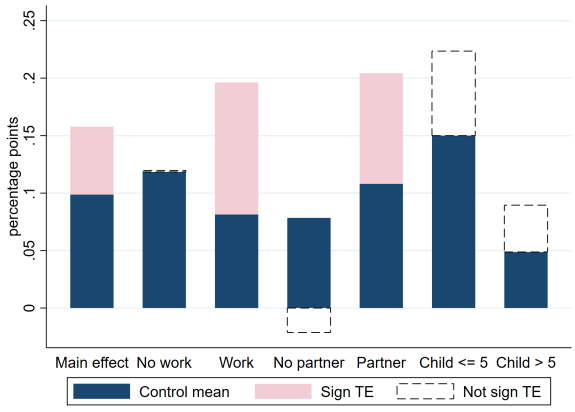
(a) Training



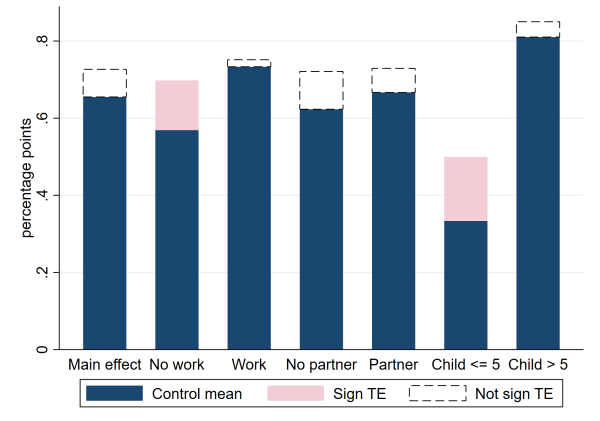
(b) Work



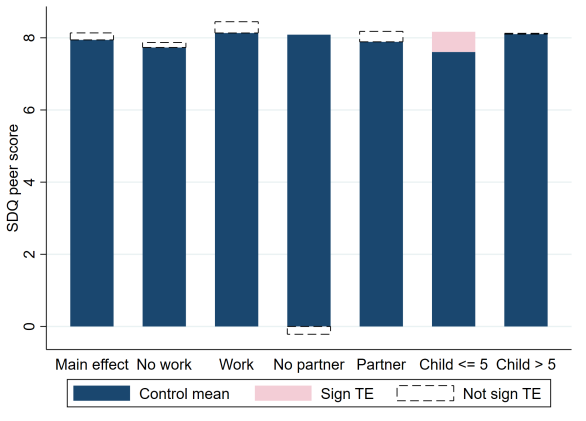
(c) Hours of work



(d) Fertility desire



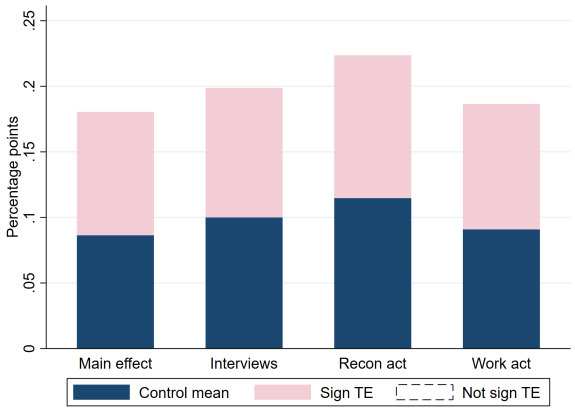
(e) Child: Activity



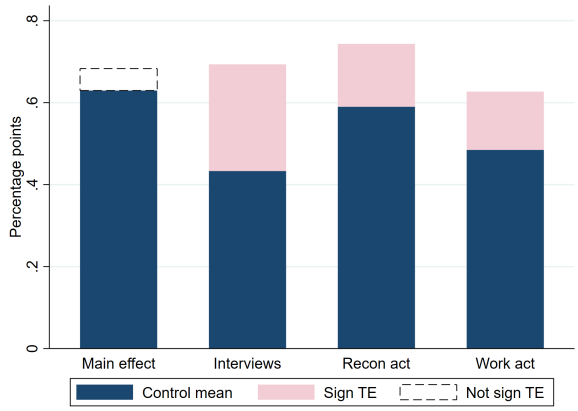
(f) Child: SDQ peer relationships

Notes: The figure compares main treatment effects with heterogeneous treatment effects across the following subgroups: employment status at baseline, presence of a partner, and households with a child younger than five years of age. The blue bar represents the control-group mean for each outcome, and the treatment effect is added on top of this mean. Treatment effects are color-coded according to statistical significance at the 10% level. P-values are obtained using randomization inference with 500 replications. All specifications include the same set of controls as in Table 3.

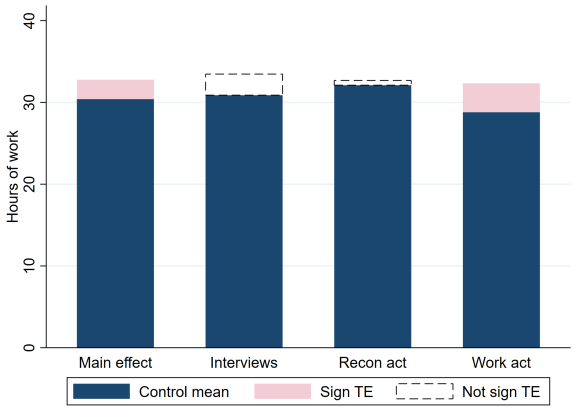
Figure 2: Heterogeneous treatment effects by activity



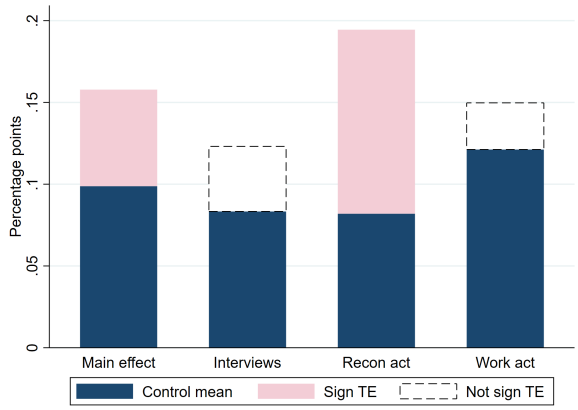
(a) Training



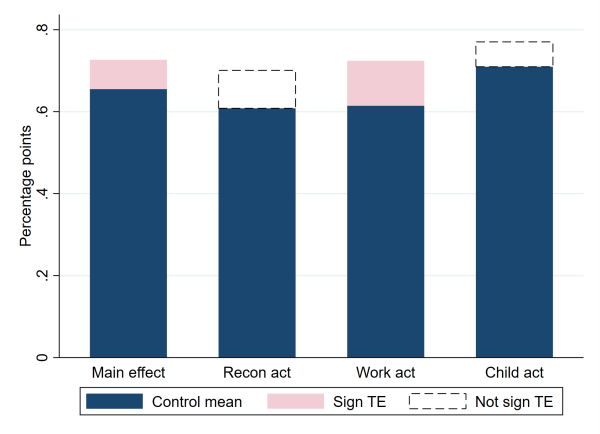
(b) Work



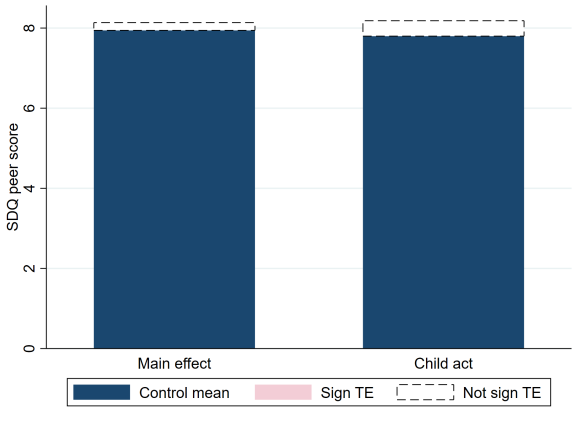
(c) Hours of work



(d) Fertility desire



(e) Child: Activity



(f) Child: SDQ peer relationships

Notes: The figure compares main treatment effects with heterogeneous treatment effects across different activity categories. We report separate estimates for women who attended more than the median number of meeting with their case worker, who engaged with reconciliation activities and with work activities. The blue bar represents the control-group mean for each outcome, and the treatment effect is added on top of this mean. Treatment effects are color-coded according to statistical significance at the 10% level. P-values are obtained using randomization inference with 500 replications. All specifications include the same set of controls as in Table 3.

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A Appendix: Supplementary tables

Table A.1: PCA: Factor Loadings and Uniqueness

Variable	Factor 1: egalit. ideology	Factor 2: women's econ. indep.
†A working mother can establish a warm and secure relationship with her children as well as a non-working mother		0.5494
A preschool child is likely to suffer if the mother works outside the home	0.7007	
Most women really want a home and children rather than paid work	0.7627	
Being a homemaker is as fulfilling as paid employment	0.4648	
†Having a job is the best way for a woman to be independent		0.7678
†Both partners should contribute to household income		0.8140
†Fathers are as capable as mothers in caring for children		0.4193
Men are less capable than women in emotional relationships	0.6209	

Notes: Answer scale ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree).
† Items were recoded so that higher values correspond to less progressive views on gender equality.

Table A.2: Response determinants

	(1)
	Probability of replying to the survey
Treated	-0.11***
	(0.04)
Age mum: Years	0.01**
	(0.00)
Working mum before treatment	-0.04
	(0.05)
Educ mum: Diploma	0.13**
	(0.05)
Educ mum: Degree	0.09
	(0.07)
Income HH: High	0.08*
	(0.05)
Mum with partner	0.11**
	(0.05)
Mum stress level	0.03***
	(0.01)
Number of children	-0.03
	(0.03)
Age youngest child	-0.01
	(0.01)
Constant	0.09
	(0.16)
Observations	482
R-squared	0.11

Notes: This table reports estimates from a linear probability model where the dependent variable equals one if the respondent completed the follow-up survey and zero otherwise. "Treated" is an indicator equal to one for women assigned to the treatment group at enrollment. All covariates are measured at baseline. Robust standard errors are reported in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Table A.3: Main outcomes: Main estimates and heterogeneity analysis by baseline participant characteristics

	Training	Is in work	Hours of work	Fertility desire	Child extra-curricular	SDQ Peer score
Panel A: Main estimates						
Treated	0.09**	0.05	2.37*	0.06*	0.07	0.19
P-value	0.01	0.24	0.07	0.08	0.10	0.28
Control mean	0.09	0.63	30.40	0.10	0.66	7.94
N	321	321	172	321	500	500
Panel B: Not working						
Treated	0.10*	0.12	-1.54	0.00	0.13**	0.14
P-value	0.07	0.16	0.69	1.00	0.03	0.67
Control mean	0.09	0.37	28.42	0.12	0.57	7.73
N	156	156	43	156	248	248
Panel C: Working						
Treated	0.08	-0.01	2.84*	0.11**	0.02	0.31
P-value	0.12	0.89	0.07	0.01	0.77	0.18
Control mean	0.08	0.86	30.98	0.08	0.73	8.13
N	165	165	129	165	252	252
Panel D: Without a partner						
Treated	0.11**	0.24**	2.39	-0.02	0.10	-0.22
P-value	0.04	0.01	0.38	0.65	0.27	0.55
Control mean	0.04	0.55	29.95	0.08	0.62	8.09
N	103	103	55	103	138	138
Panel E: With a partner						
Treated	0.09*	-0.02	2.51	0.10**	0.06	0.29
P-value	0.08	0.69	0.14	0.02	0.20	0.17
Control mean	0.11	0.67	30.56	0.11	0.67	7.89
N	218	218	117	218	362	362
Panel F: Youngest child below 5						
Treated	0.08	0.14**	4.65*	0.07	0.17**	0.56**
P-value	0.15	0.04	0.07	0.17	0.05	0.04
Control mean	0.11	0.58	28.65	0.15	0.33	7.61
N	160	160	82	160	168	168
Panel G: Youngest child above 5						
Treated	0.10**	-0.03	1.29	0.04	0.04	0.02
P-value	0.03	0.60	0.46	0.27	0.35	0.91
Control mean	0.06	0.68	32.00	0.05	0.81	8.10
N	161	161	90	161	332	332

Notes: Tables reports estimates from Figure 1. Reported coefficients correspond to treatment effects from separate regressions for each outcome and each subgroup. P-values are obtained using randomization inference with 500 replications. All specifications control for mother's age, employment status, education, household income, partnership status, stress level, number of children in the household, the age of the youngest child and strata FEs. Child outcomes are estimated using the child-level dataset where we control for child age, gender, mother's education, household income, partnership status, number of children in the household and strata FEs; standard errors are clustered at the household level. Control means are reported for the comparison group. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Table A.4: Secondary outcomes: Main estimates and heterogeneity analysis by baseline participant characteristics

	Happy with job	Satisfied career	Satisfied reconc.	Satisfied life	Stressed in workday	Factor 1: egalit. ideology	Factor 2: women's econ. indep.
Panel A: Main estimates							
Treated	0.14**	0.10	0.02	0.11**	0.05	-0.17	-0.09
P-value	0.05	0.18	0.83	0.02	0.28	0.13	0.47
Control mean	0.58	0.53	0.51	0.61	0.55	0.09	0.04
N	175	175	175	311	321	321	321
Panel B: Not working							
Treated	0.20	0.01	0.19	0.23***	0.13*	-0.23	-0.19
P-value	0.24	0.98	0.24	0.00	0.10	0.13	0.28
Control mean	0.53	0.53	0.63	0.48	0.41	0.02	0.08
N	45	45	45	150	156	156	156
Panel C: Working							
Treated	0.12	0.14	0.00	0.00	-0.03	-0.10	0.00
P-value	0.14	0.13	1.00	0.99	0.70	0.47	1.00
Control mean	0.59	0.53	0.47	0.72	0.67	0.15	0.01
N	130	130	130	161	165	165	165
Panel D: Without a partner							
Treated	0.10	-0.03	-0.08	0.15	0.16*	-0.24	0.27
P-value	0.50	0.96	0.62	0.17	0.08	0.20	0.16
Control mean	0.64	0.59	0.50	0.48	0.47	-0.18	0.09
N	56	56	56	102	103	103	103
Panel E: With a partner							
Treated	0.16*	0.15	0.08	0.10	0.01	-0.20*	-0.27*
P-value	0.09	0.13	0.41	0.11	0.84	0.10	0.06
Control mean	0.56	0.51	0.51	0.67	0.59	0.22	0.01
N	119	119	119	209	218	218	218
Panel F: Youngest child below 5							
Treated	-0.08	0.01	-0.07	0.11	-0.02	-0.20	-0.36**
P-value	0.46	1.00	0.56	0.14	0.87	0.21	0.03
Control mean	0.73	0.58	0.60	0.71	0.58	0.28	0.16
N	84	84	84	155	160	160	160
Panel G: Youngest child above 5							
Treated	0.30**	0.10	0.09	0.10	0.12*	-0.15	0.20
P-value	0.02	0.34	0.55	0.14	0.10	0.32	0.22
Control mean	0.44	0.49	0.42	0.51	0.52	-0.09	-0.08
N	91	91	91	156	161	161	161

Notes: Tables reports main effects and subgroup estimates for secondary outcomes. P-values are obtained using randomization inference with 500 replications. All specifications control for mother's age, employment status, education, household income, partnership status, stress level, number of children in the household, the age of the youngest child and strata FEs. Control means are reported for the comparison group. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Table A.5: Main outcomes: Heterogeneity by activity type

Panel A: Main estimates						
	Training	**Is in work**	**Hours of work**	**Fertility desire**	**Child extra-curricular**	**SDQ Peer score**
Treated	0.09**	0.05	2.37*	0.06*	0.07*	0.19
P-value	0.02	0.23	0.07	0.08	0.10	0.30
Control mean	0.09	0.63	30.40	0.10	0.66	7.94
N	321	321	172	321	500	500
Panel B: Interviews						
Treated	0.10*	0.26***	2.58	0.04		
P-value	0.09	0.00	0.32	0.42		
Control mean	0.10	0.43	30.89	0.08		
N	180	180	84	180		
Panel C: Reconciliation activities						
Treated	0.11*	0.15**	0.58	0.11**	0.09	0.22
P-value	0.08	0.02	0.78	0.02	0.12	0.43
Control mean	0.11	0.59	32.11	0.08	0.61	7.97
N	152	152	87	152	229	229
Panel D: Work activities						
Treated	0.10*	0.14**	3.53*	0.03	0.11**	0.08
P-value	0.06	0.01	0.09	0.50	0.03	0.73
Control mean	0.09	0.48	28.80	0.12	0.61	7.98
N	233	233	105	233	350	350
Panel E: Child activities						
Treated					0.06	0.38
P-value					0.25	0.12
Control mean					0.71	7.80
N					286	286

Tables reports estimates from Figure 2. Reported coefficients correspond to treatment effects from separate regressions for each outcome and each activity subgroup. P-values are obtained using randomization inference with 500 replications. All specifications control for mother's age, employment status, education, household income, partnership status, stress level, number of children in the household, the age of the youngest child and strata FEs. Child outcomes are estimated using the child-level dataset where we control for child age, gender, mother's education, household income, partnership status, number of children in the household and strata FEs; standard errors are clustered at the household level. Control means are reported for the comparison group. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Table A.6: Robustness check: Reweighing by activity participation

	Training	Is in work	Hours of work	Fertility desire	Child extra-curricular	SDQ Peer score
Panel A: Interviews						
Treated - Unweighted	0.10*	0.26***	2.58	0.04		
P-value	0.06	0.00	0.27	0.39		
Control mean	0.10	0.43	30.89	0.08		
N	180	180	84	180		
Treated - Weighted	0.10*	0.26***	2.99	0.04		
P-value	0.08	0.00	0.20	0.44		
Control mean	0.10	0.45	30.66	0.09		
N	180	180	84	180		
Panel B: Reconciliation activities						
Treated - Unweighted	0.11*	0.15**	0.58	0.11**		
P-value	0.08	0.02	0.72	0.03		
Control mean	0.11	0.59	32.11	0.08		
N	152	152	87	152		
Treated - Weighted	0.07	0.17**	0.14	0.10**		
P-value	0.27	0.02	0.95	0.03		
Control mean	0.14	0.55	32.52	0.06		
N	152	152	87	152		
Panel C: Work activities						
Treated - Unweighted	0.10**	0.14**	3.53**	0.03		
P-value	0.05	0.02	0.04	0.49		
Control mean	0.09	0.48	28.80	0.12		
N	233	233	105	233		
Treated - Weighted	0.10*	0.13**	3.66**	0.03		
P-value	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.37		
Control mean	0.09	0.52	29.03	0.12		
N	233	233	105	233		
Panel D: Children activities						
Treated - Unweighted					0.06	0.38
P-value					0.25	0.12
Control mean					0.71	7.80
N					286	286
Treated - Weighted					0.07	0.40
P-value					0.22	0.10
Control mean					0.71	7.78
N					286	286

Notes: Table compares unweighted (main) estimates with weighted estimates that rebalance participants who selected a given activity to match the characteristics of the follow-up sample. Weighted estimates are obtained using entropy balancing within each subgroup. We match the first moments of the following variables: mother's age, mother's education, mother's employment status, number of children in the household, and household income. Results for children's extracurricular activities and SDQ scores are based on the child-level dataset, where matching is performed on child age, child gender, mother's education, partner presence, number of children in the household, and household income. P-values are obtained using randomization inference with 500 replications; child-level estimates allow for clustering. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

Table A.7: Determinants of future engagement with Equilibri

		Interviews				Work act.				Reconciliation act.			
	All	**High**	**Low**	**Diff.**	**p-value**	**Yes**	**No**	**Diff.**	**p-value**	**Yes**	**No**	**Diff.**	**p-value**
Training	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.00	1.00	0.09	0.08	0.01	0.99	0.11	0.07	0.05	0.42
Is in work	0.63	0.51	0.79	-0.27***	0.00	0.48	0.86	-0.37***	0.00	0.59	0.65	-0.06	0.56
Hours of work	30.40	30.44	30.38	0.07	1.00	28.80	31.55	-2.75	0.20	32.11	29.55	2.55	0.29
Fertility desire	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.00	1.00	0.12	0.06	0.06	0.33	0.08	0.11	-0.03	0.88

Notes: The sample is restricted to women in the control group who responded to the follow-up interview. "Interviews" refers to meetings with a case manager. Women are classified into high- and low-intensity interview groups based on whether their number of meetings with the case manager is above or below the median. For each outcome, the table reports baseline mean values by subsequent engagement with the program and tests for differences across engagement categories. The purpose is to assess whether women who later engage more intensively with program activities differ in pre-existing outcomes. P-values are obtained using randomization inference with 500 replications. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.10$.

B Appendix B: Baseline Questionnaire

Section 1: Privacy and Consent

- Privacy statement [...] do you consent to the processing of the personal data provided for the purposes of this project?
  - Yes
  - No

Section 2: Personal Information

- First name
- Last name
- Tax identification number (Codice Fiscale). Participants were asked to generate the code based on their personal information if it was not readily available.

Section 3: Employment Situation

- Which statement best describes your current employment situation?
  1. I do not work and I am not looking for a job
  2. I do not work, I am not looking for a job, but I would like to work
  3. I do not work and I am actively looking for a job (e.g. sending CVs, attending interviews, checking job advertisements in the last two weeks)
  4. I work occasionally
  5. I work regularly as an employee
  6. I work regularly as an employee, but I am looking for a new job
  7. I work regularly as self-employed (e.g.: freelancer, micro-entrepreneur)
  8. I work regularly as self-employed, but I would like to change jobs
- On average, how many hours do you work per week?
- Would you like to work more hours per week?
  - Yes
  - No
- What is your highest level of education?

Section 4: Household Composition

- How many children do you have? (Please refer only to children below 18)
- Do you live with a partner?
  - Yes
  - No

Section 5: Care Responsibilities (Weekdays)

- Considering weekdays from Monday to Friday, on how many out of five days are you personally responsible for childcare?
- Have you used a babysitter in the past month?
  - Yes
  - No
- Do your parents (or your partner's parents) help you with childcare?
  - Yes
  - No
- Do your parents (or your partner's parents) regularly require your assistance?
  - Yes
  - No
- Thinking about a typical weekday (school drop-off, grocery shopping, meal preparation, childcare), how many hours per day do you spend on these activities?

Section 6: Child-Specific Information

The following set of questions was repeated for each minor child.

- Child's first name
- Child's tax identification number (Codice Fiscale)
- If the child is under six years old, does he/she attend daycare or preschool?
  - Yes
  - No
- If the child attends primary school, does he/she attend full-time or part-time?
- If the child is over six years old, does he/she participate in extracurricular activities at least once per week?

  - Yes
  - No

- If the child is 16 years old or older, is he/she still attending school?
  - Yes
  - No

- Do you have another child?
  - Yes (the section was repeated)
  - No

Up to five children could be reported.

Section 7: Economic Condition

- Participation in the program requires submission of the ISEE certificate (Equivalent Economic Situation Indicator). Please indicate the value of your ISEE.
- What is the issue date reported on your ISEE certificate? (The certificate must be valid.)

Section 8: Contact Information

- Email address
- Mobile phone number

C Appendix C: Follow-up Questionnaire

Employment and Job Satisfaction

D1. Which statement best describes your current employment situation?

1. I do not work and I am not looking for a job
2. I do not work, I am not looking for a job, but I would like to work
3. I do not work and I am actively looking for a job (e.g. sending CVs, attending interviews, checking job advertisements in the last two weeks)
4. I work occasionally
5. I work regularly as an employee
6. I work regularly as an employee, but I am looking for a new job
7. I work regularly as self-employed (e.g.: freelancer, micro-entrepreneur)
8. I work regularly as self-employed, but I would like to change jobs

D2. On average, how many hours per week do you work? _____

D3. Would you like to work more?

1. Yes
2. No, this is fine
3. No, I would like to work fewer hours

D4. Do you like your job? (scale from 1 to 10) _____

D5. How satisfied are you with your job in terms of opportunities for professional growth (learning new skills, new tasks, or higher earnings)? (1–10)

D6. How satisfied are you with your job in allowing a good balance between work and personal/family commitments? (1–10)

D7. Have you changed jobs in the last 9 months (since MONTH 2023)?

1. Yes
2. No

D8. Have you attended professional training courses in the last 9 months (since MONTH 2023)?

1. Yes
2. No

D8_hours. How many hours? _____

D9. In the last 9 months, have you started procedures for the validation of qualifications (e.g. foreign degrees) or formal recognition of skills?

1. Yes
2. No

D10. In the last 9 months, have you requested support from third-sector organizations for job search or work–family reconciliation?

1. Yes, requested but did not obtain support
2. Yes, requested and obtained support
3. Yes, requested but did not use the services
4. No, did not request support

D11. Which of the following services do you know and/or have you used? (Response categories: 1 = Used; 2 = Aware of but never used; 3 = Not aware)

- Local tax assistance offices (CAF)
- Employment centers / job agencies
- Social services
- Psychological counseling services
- Mental health services
- Adult education centers / evening schools
- Police headquarters / Prefecture
- Family support centers
- Youth and educational centers
- Metropolitan coordination hubs
- Anti-discrimination networks / Equality counselor
- Chamber of Commerce

Children, School, and Time Use

Respondents are asked to answer the following questions starting with the youngest child. The same block of questions is repeated for each additional child (up to four).

D12. Child's name: _____

D13. Child's gender:

1. Male
2. Female

D14. Year of birth: _____

D15. Current status:

1. Not yet attending childcare or school
2. Attends nursery (daycare)
3. Attends preschool, primary school, or lower secondary school
4. Attends upper secondary school
5. No longer attends school

D16. With whom does the child spend most of the day?

1. Mother
2. Father
3. Grandparents
4. Other relatives, friends, or neighbors
5. Babysitter

D17. In the last month, has the child attended a library, play center, or other structured activities?

1. Yes
2. No

D18. On a typical weekday, how much time does the child spend using screens (TV, tablet, phone, videogames)?

1. Less than 30 minutes
2. 30 minutes to 1 hour
3. 1 to 1.5 hours
4. More than 1 to 2 hours
5. More than 2 hours
6. Don't know

D25. Does the child participate in weekly extracurricular activities? (multiple answers possible)

- Sports
- Music or artistic activities
- Coding or foreign language courses
- Library or play center
- Religious or community activities
- Other
- None

D26. During the past summer, did the child attend a summer camp for at least one week?

1. Yes
2. No

D27. In the last 6 months, did the child receive help (other than from parents) with studying or homework?

1. Yes
2. No

D29. Please indicate how true the following statements are for the child (1 = Not true; 2 = Partly true; 3 = Completely true):

- Rather solitary
- Has at least one good friend
- Generally well accepted by peers
- Has better relationships with adults than peers
- Often argues with or deliberately annoys peers

Attitudes, Well-being, and Family Life

D31. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements (1 = Strongly agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Disagree; 4 = Strongly disagree; 5 = Don't know; 6 = No answer):

- A working mother can establish a warm and secure relationship with her children as well as a non-working mother
- A preschool child is likely to suffer if the mother works outside the home
- Most women really want a home and children rather than paid work

- Being a homemaker is as fulfilling as paid employment
- Having a job is the best way for a woman to be independent
- Both partners should contribute to household income
- Fathers are as capable as mothers in caring for children
- Men are less capable than women in emotional relationships

D32. On a typical weekday, how stressed do you feel by the combination of work, household duties, and family commitments? (1 = Not at all stressed; 10 = Very stressed)

D33. In the last month, did you spend leisure time without children?

1. Yes, several times
2. Yes, once
3. No

D34. In the last month, did you discuss personal matters (work, children, family) with someone?

1. Yes, several times
2. Yes, once
3. No

D35. Overall, how satisfied are you with your current life? (1 = Very dissatisfied; 10 = Very satisfied; 11 = Don't know; 12 = No answer)

D36. Given your current work situation and work–family balance, would you like to have another child in the future?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure