

Barcelona Treball

Summary of sector trends: Social services

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Emergence of business groups

Changes in family patterns are bringing the emergence of new market niches for companies. Very often, the family can no longer be directly responsible for providing the services necessary for daily life and has to resort to external companies specialized in the provision of care for people.

Traditionally, families have been responsible for the attention and care of dependents (especially children, the elderly and people with disabilities), through what is called "informal support". This task usually falls, almost exclusively, on women in the family (mothers, spouses or children of the dependent person). It could be said **that the family is organized as a company to provide services to its members.**

But a series of **demographic changes** have taken place over the last that have led to the **transformation of the traditional family model and the emergence of new family structures**, such as single parents (consisting of a single adult member, usually the woman, and the children) or unipersonal households (formed by one person, usually the elderly). These changes have made the informal support model enter into crisis, as families are no longer able to care for their dependent members.

One of the major demographic changes is the **incorporation of women into the labor market**. The fact that the person who developed the role of family caregiver enters the labor market and, therefore, is outside home for much of the day, makes it impossible for this person to take care of family dependents.

It must be said that, in addition to women participation in the labour market, there has also been a **change in the value system**, and it is being spread the perception that women do not have the obligation to assume the role of sole carer or main family.

The **progressive aging of the population** is another demographic change explaining the emergence of companies that provide care to people. The fact that people's life lengthens more and more also increases the chances of needing attention and care services. Thus, in families there are less caregivers each time and more members needing care.

Given this situation, **many companies are opting to offer services until now carried out by families**. This will open new market niches in the area of services to people (children, elderly, people with disabilities). It must be said that Law 39/2006 for the promotion of personal autonomy and care for people, the so-called Law of the Dependent, led to the emergence of new businesses aimed at providing services to groups of people with special needs (**called services daily living**).



Impact on the sector

The changes in the traditional family model and, in general, in the socioeconomic structure of Catalonia (and also the rest of Spain) have created new needs for care of people and contributed to the **sector's professionalization**.

Despite this trend toward professionalization, which began in the 80s, **it was not until recent years that social services have started to be seen as a relatively mature sector**. Indeed, throughout the first decade of the century it was considered that the sector of social services and care for people was an incomplete market, characterized by fragmented and unstructured supply, and poorly defined demand. In addition, the supply was insufficient or inadequate and very diverse (consisting of many companies with a poorly defined portfolio, and proposals for services and uneven quality levels)¹.

The sector was highly fragmented and atomized, since the vast majority of service companies were small or micro, or local community level entities. In recent years, however, **the appearance of large business groups has consolidated** (according to INE data, it is estimated that companies with more than 50 workers in the sector has increased by approximately 20% between 2008 and 2012). The entrance of these groups demonstrates the existing wide margin for sector's growth. It also helps make visible the existence of a range of services to people, strengthens the sector from the corporate and organizational point of view, and improves its image because links the sector with professionalism, expertise and quality. In this regard, allying will be key for social institutions to compete with large business groups.

Sometimes, in the sector coexist, in conflict or at least in tension, different intervention models: business-oriented private enterprises, social organizations and the public sector. Indeed, companies have had a strong entrance into the field of personal services, and this has led to tensions with social sector entities that must compete with profit-oriented firms and cost optimization. Private companies tend to intervene in those areas and in those groups where there may be a greater economic return, while social institutions often are relegated to serving those groups that, because of their low purchasing power, are economically unprofitable. It can be said that companies providing services to people who can afford to pay them, while social organizations are primarily focused on those who are unable to afford them. In any case, the differentiation in the intervention models can result in failing to satisfy some of people's demands because the provision of these services is not profitable for the private sector.

Large business groups tend to diversify. Although they offer services in all areas, they achieve greater penetration in the following subsectors:

- Home services: personal care services (care and dependent care) and chore services (mainly cleaning the house) lie within this category.
- New technologies for everyday life: it includes telecare or telemedicine services.
- Residential services and day centers.
- Children's Services: the services are aimed at the care of children before they are old enough to go to school (babysitters, daycare, etc.).

In 2011 over 50,000 people were users of telecare service of the City of Barcelona.

The professionalization of social services began in the 80s of the last century and one of its main consequences is the entry into the field of large enterprise groups.

¹ Analysis and boost of Continuous Training in the new employment sources in the social sector. Fundació Pere Tarrés, 2005.

Impact on professional profiles

It is estimated that the potential for job creation in the sector until 2015 is about 635,000 workers.

Teamwork is one of the cross-cutting skills valued in large companies in the social services sector.

Despite the growth of the sector of social services and care for people, in recent years in Catalonia and Spain, many experts point out that there is still no clear definition of the required professional profiles. In any case, it seems clear that the emergence of large business groups is bringing **greater professionalization in the sector**. Indeed, the informal provision of services (provided by the family or by volunteers) is giving way to the services provided by professionals in the field.

This increased professionalization, derived in part from the emergence of large business groups, also has an impact on training in the sector. In recent years the **training offered to professionals in social services has been segmented and diversified**. There are a large number of schools, public and private, offering courses and training activities with quite different features and quality levels. It must be said, however, that very large companies often choose to conduct themselves the training for their workers within the same company, without resorting to external entities. In this regard, it is important to notice that the training or retraining of workers is still a priority for many large companies in recent years.

The upward trend in the number of large companies involved in the sector has **raised the demand for a managerial job profiles**. Thus, besides the professionals who are responsible for the provision of the service itself, large companies demand professionals who are responsible for the service planning and management. In this sense, these professionals must be endowed with knowledgeable about the social sector, but also in management and business services.

But large corporations involved in the sector (as well as smaller companies) also require workers who are responsible for service delivery and direct contact with customers. Among the most demanded professional profiles in the field of home care services, there are social workers, family workers and domestic workers. On the other hand, in the subsector of residential services and day centers, where there is significant penetration of large companies, most demanded professional profiles are doctors, nurses, psychologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, socio-cultural, and monitors of physical activities and sports.

As for the skills required by companies, employees of social services point out that, besides the specific technical expertise of each job, the **main cross-cutting skills relate to emotional competencies such as self-control, empathy or the self-development**. The fact that **teamwork** is fundamental in large companies implies that workers need having this skill. This represents a change in comparison to smaller companies, which often works more on an individual basis and, therefore, teamwork is not as relevant.

More information about the industry is available on the Barcelona Treball website
[Market > Industries](#)

[Social services](#)

This section of the website contains a report on the industry covering employment aspects, where you can see job files for various job profiles and find out the main resources you need to find work in the industry.

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