



Intergenerational approach to work-life balance and childcare

At [Make Mothers Matter](#), we believe the European Union must embrace an **intergenerational approach** to work-life balance and childcare, if we are to meet the challenges ahead—work-life balance, better mental health, social cohesion—.

The way we care for children—how we support parents, and how we value unpaid care work—defines not only the present but the future of our societies.

And **grandparents** are part of this equation: they play a vital role in a child's development and education. They offer emotional support, stability, and often essential caregiving. Their contribution helps parents, particularly mothers, navigate the often overwhelming balance between professional life and personal responsibility.

As highlighted by the Council Conclusions on Ensuring work-life balance and gender equality for all generations in the context of demographic challenges", 2024, parents, especially mothers, often face serious challenges in **reconciling parenthood with a working career**. **Gender stereotypes** and **lack of support** mean **mothers perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care work**, which negatively impacts their careers and increases gender inequality, such as the gender pay and pension gaps.

Mothers are more often **impacted in their careers than fathers by the arrival of a child**. The **motherhood penalty** leads to career interruptions and part-time or poorly paid jobs for many mothers, increasing financial vulnerability, especially for single mothers. We believe that **the choice to nurture a child and develop a career is not a sacrifice**, but a **right** that must be fully supported.

The recent **MMM European [survey](#) of more than 10.000 mothers in Europe** showed us the following numbers:

23% of mothers **reduced** their working hours

55% of mothers **changed their working status** after having a child

35% of mothers report benefiting from **a gradual return to work**,

46% from **adapted working hours**

Just **27%** have access to **teleworking options**

27% of mothers stated **motherhood negatively impacted their careers**

At least **63%** of **household and caregiving** tasks are handled by **mothers alone (and up to 70%)**, regardless of their employment status

25% of fathers **took no paternity leave**

Families often choose grandparents due to lack of other options, **financial constraints**, and the need for **trustworthy caregivers**. Having raised children themselves, grandparents are often seen as naturally qualified. Their involvement, which should be based on a voluntary basis, also fosters **intergenerational bonds**. On the other hand **retirement** can bring **loneliness and boredom**, affecting seniors' physical and mental health. Encouraging older adults to stay active—like being engaged grandparents—helps **prevent isolation** and provides them with a **meaningful role**. This **intergenerational bond holds society together** and enables the **transmission of knowledge and values**.



Active grandparents ought to be rewarded because they do a service that benefits society at large. While not necessarily through pay, **other forms of recognition** are possible.

Several European countries have already implemented **measures to value unpaid care work and support caregivers.**

- In [Sweden](#) (since July 1, 2024), parents can transfer parental leave days to someone else, such as grandparents. Up to **45 days (or 90 for single parents)** can be transferred, with the allowance based on the recipient's income or a capped base if retired.
- In **Germany and Austria**, older people volunteer to care for children, especially when **grandparents live far away or are absent**. These “**Leihomas und Leihopas**” (borrowed grandparents) support families and help parents achieve a **healthy work-life balance** and creates life long lasting bonds. For example, in Bochum, the **Child Protection League** coordinates such initiatives.
- In the [UK](#), parents can **donate Child Benefit credits** to grandparents or relatives caring for children under 12. **1 in 5 grandmothers** reportedly provide at least 10 hours of childcare weekly.
- In [Portugal](#), **working grandparents can receive 30 days of allowance** to care for a sick child if parents don't use that time.
- [Hungary](#) has found another way to reward grandparents' work. Since 2020, non-retired grandparents have been eligible for a child care fee up to 2 years of age of the child (or 3 in the case of twins).^[4] The scope of this system is nonetheless limited in that it reaches only working grandparents.
- **Companies are also exploring intergenerational work-life balance.** For instance, UK-based Saga offers **paid leave to working grandparents—one week off for the birth of a grandchild.**

An international example comes from **Japan**, where the town of [Nagi](#) has become a model for **integrating elderly into childcare**. Seniors serve as **honorary grandparents**, mentoring and supporting parents. They built **Multigenerational Community Spaces** that promote interaction between seniors and children, enhancing community and continuity. Nagi's model has led to a **stable birth rate**, stronger social ties, and better well-being for parents, children and older people.

However, we must be **cautious** on how we apply these models, in order not to have fathers to avoid using their **paternity leave**.

Other solutions that promote intergenerational support include **intergenerational housing**, which benefits people of all ages by fostering close connections between generations. One of our members ([Les trois pommiers](#)) in Belgium proposes such a housing model. This structure offers a safe and supportive environment where **single mothers, children, and older adults** can live together, interact in a more natural and meaningful way, and provide mutual support. Many mothers report experiencing a sense of security, understanding, and connection—for both themselves and their children—than they would by living only with other mothers in similar situations. The diversity of ages and life experiences in the community helps create a more balanced and supportive atmosphere.

Intergenerational solidarity should also be supported by **accessible and affordable communities, lifelong learning**, and the **recognition and validation of soft skills that derive from caring**, such as **parental skills**.

MMM recommendations:



- **Redefine “work”** as a **holistic concept** that includes both paid and unpaid contributions.
- Consider **unpaid care work** as **essential service**, deserving **access to social rights**.
- Establish **“care credits”** within pension systems to avoid penalising those who care for others.
- Adopt an **intergenerational care policy framework** that reflects the EU's commitment to equity and solidarity between generations.
- Encourage rules allowing the **transfer of parental leave days to grandparents**, based on voluntary basis, so parents can return to work while **grandparents' care work is recognised**.
- Promote **intergenerational housing systems**
- Promote **family-supportive company policies**, including **paid leave for grandparents**, so they can care for grandchildren without compromising their careers.
- Recognise and validate the **soft skills** that derive **from caring**,

We need to **stop living in silos**—divided by **age, roles, institutions, and even architecture**. In order to address the societal and personal crises we face—including growing mental health challenges—we must reawaken a shared sense of belonging, one that connects us across generations and values every stage of life.