GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS:

HOW
TO SUPPORT
MEN
AND THEIR
WORK-LIFE
BALANCE



WORKPLACE SUPPORT FOR CARING MASCULINITIES

ABOUT MIC PROJECT

Men in Care is a European 3-year project (March 2019 - Sept. 2022) of 12 national organizations (universities, social partners and NGOs) co-funded by the European Commission under the EaSI program (PROGRESS axis). Men in Care (MiC) aims to improve workplace conditions to promote men taking caring roles in seven countries (Austria, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Slovenia and Spain). MiC have assessed how policies and workplace cultures can change to enable men to become more active in caring for children, elderly, partners, coworkers and friends. MiC partners are: National Distance Education University (project coordinator, Spain), Fundación 1 de Mayo (Spain), Verein für Männerund Geschlechterthemen Steiermark (Austria), European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (Germany), University of Iceland, REFORM (Resources Centre for Men, Norway), Jagiellonian University (Poland), PLinEU (Poland), Diversity Hub (Poland), The Peace Institute (Slovenia), the Association of Employers of Slovenia and the Association of Free Trade Unions of Slovenia. Fourteen associated organizations from seven countries also participate in the project.

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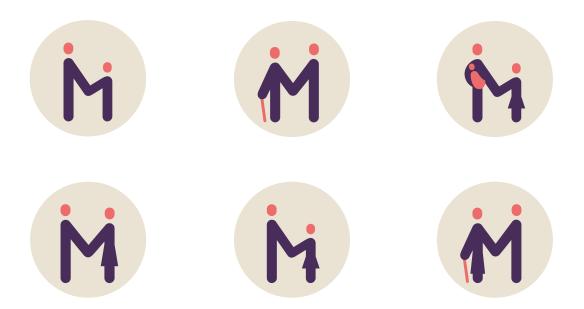
INTRODUCTION

During a professional career, all workers experience difficulties balancing work and other life responsibilities. Still, this is often seen as a women's issue or a question about workers with special needs. Yet, men must take responsibility for care as a matter of social justice and increasing necessity.

How can your company facilitate a healthy work-life balance for your workers? What are the obstacles in your company to men wanting to combine work with care?

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide has been made for employers, human resources departments, gender experts and workers' representatives who are interested in discovering and satisfying the work-life balance needs of men in their company. You will learn about the barriers men often have to try to overcome and the consequences they have. You will receive advice on how to recruit, accommodate and retain workers who prioritise a well-balanced relationship between work and family or other care responsibilities to achieve a more motivated, happier and productive workforce.

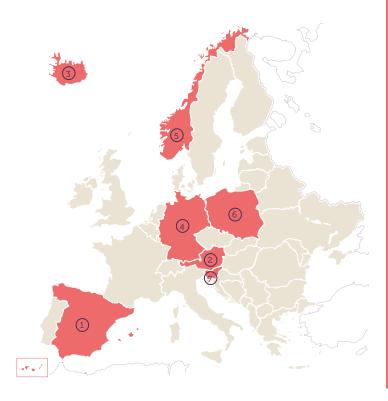


THIS GUIDE IS BASED ON FINDINGS FROM THE "MEN IN CARE" STUDY

The background for this guide is the EU project Men in Care – workplace support for caring masculinities. Through this project we have studied companies in six European countries, assessing how organisational cultures and structural conditions can affect men with carer responsibilities. Based on the results from good-practice companies, we have gained new and relevant knowledge about cultural and structural barriers, and developed powerful measures to enhance workers' balance between work and life.

PARTNERS & AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS

3. ICELAND 5. NORWAY 7. SLOVENIA 1. SPAIN 2. AUSTRIA 4. GERMANY 6. POLAND



1.2 Fundación 1 de Mavo 1.3 Municipality of Madrid 1.4 PPiiNA - Platform for Equal and Non-transferable

1.1 National Distance Education University (UNED)

- 1.5 The Basque Institute for Women/Emakunde
- 1.6 Red NUST-Ajuntament de Barcelona
- 1.7 DenBBora

2.1 Verein für Männer- und Geschlechterthemen Steiermark (VMG)

- 2.2 ÖGB-Steiermark/Austrian Trade Union of the
- 3.1. University of Iceland
- 3.2 Alþýðusamband Íslands/Icelandic Confederation of Labour (ASÍ)

4.1 European Network for the Work with Perpetrators of Domestic Violence (WWP EN)

- 4.2 European Academy for Women in Politics and Business (EAF Berlin)
- 4.3 Bundesforum Männer/Federal Forum Men -

5.1 REFORM - Resource Centre for Men

- 5.2 Agder County Council / Likestilt Arbeidsliv
- 5.3 The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud
- 5.4 Equality Check

6.1 Jagiellonian University in Kraków

- 6.2 PLinEU
- 6.4 Konfederacja Lewiatan/Polish Confederation
- 7.1 The Peace Institute
- 7.2 Association of Employers of Slovenia (ZDS)
- 7.3 The association of free trade unions of Slovenia (ZSSS)

European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

WHAT IS CARE, AND WHO IS A CARER?

Giving and receiving care is a fundamental way for humans to build relationships with our loved ones and our communities. Caregiving has been described as a cycle of care with varying degrees of interdependence, emotional attachment and reciprocity in the caregiving relationships. Research on mental health points out that close relationships are important for our mental and physical health and resilience to withstand stress. Workers in your company have close relatives, friends or other significant people in their lives who might become ill or need extra support and care in other circumstances, including self-care.

Some workers have greater care responsibilities than others, for instance those who care for and support children, people with disabilities, and elderly parents, partners, relatives or friends who are ill. You also need to care for yourself, both physically and psychologically, and sometimes these care responsibilities can have a substantial impact on your work and working hours. And sometimes it's the other way around; work responsibilities have a substantial impact on the amount of care work you can do.

Giving and receiving care involves all of us, but the distribution of care work and the financial consequences of caregiving are often gendered and unequally distributed.³



"GENDER CARE GAP" LOSING FEMALE WORKERS

Many workers find themselves forced to work part time or reduce working hours to meet care needs. Some lose income, pension points and career-advancement opportunities. Some workers are forced out of work completely. To a greater extent than men, women experience pressure and the expectation of being the one to take the main responsibility for the household. The result is evident in what is described as the "gender care gap".

In the **Men in Care** project we have analysed the national contexts of the gender care gap in eight European countries (Norway, Austria, Germany, Iceland, Spain, North Macedonia, Slovenia and Poland). The report <u>Carving out Space for Caring Masculinities</u> (2021)⁴ provides an overview of the findings.

For companies, this gap usually results in the loss of valuable female workers. The importance of women's contributions to the workforce is a major reason for the <u>EU Directive on Work-life balance for parents and carers (2019)</u>⁵. The directive, with its policy requirements, is to be implemented in all member and EFTA states by July 2022.

It is widely recognised that governments and labour and employer organisations need to take steps to prevent losing highly educated female workers. Examples of this are the major umbrella organisation for Norwegian employers (NHO) actively advocating for an equal and non-transferable split of the parental leave scheme between parents, and the Spanish parental leave reform, which entitles fathers to 16 weeks of non-transferable and 100% paid leave until the child's first birthday.

WHAT CAN YOU GAIN BY BEING A COMPANY THAT FACILITATES CARERS?

HAVE HIGHER
MOTIVATION
AND CREATIVITY
IN YOUR
WORKFORCE

HAVE LOWER TURNOVER GET
INCREASED
DIVERSITY AND
IMPROVED
GENDER
BALANCE

HAVE LESS STRESS AND BURNOUT AMONG WORKERS

HAVE LOWER
TRAINING COSTS
DUE TO LOWER
TURNOVER AND
LESS SICK LEAVE

BE A
RECOGNISED
SOCIALLY
RESPONSIBLE
COMPANY

GET
INCREASED
LOYALTY
AMONG
WORKERS

HAVE
LESS SICK
LEAVE AND
ABSENTEEISM

BE A MORE
ATTRACTIVE
WORKPLACE

WHY PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO MALE CARERS?

Since care work is often perceived as a female domain, men and women also experience different costs and rewards when attempting to reconcile care and work responsibilities. For men, some receive high recognition for engaging in care work, while others might be mocked, ignored or devalued by colleagues for doing "non-masculine" work

An ageing population in need of care, as well as a younger generation of men and women valuing equality, put pressure on companies to adapt and adjust company culture to accommodate their workers' expectations. Thus, male workers need special attention because the barriers they face can differ from those of their female counterparts.

WHAT KIND OF BARRIERS CAN A MALE CARER FACE?

Three factors must be taken into consideration when working within a company to unmask care needs and facilitate care for male and other carers:

THE TYPE OF COMPANY

Different companies have different barriers, usually depending on the time scheme and the type of work being done by workers. An office worker will face different obstacles than a teacher, carpenter, police officer, driver or industrial worker will.

COMPANY CULTURE

The company's culture, values and ways of thinking about workers may create barriers for male carers. Competitive work cultures can lead to a working environment that devalues care work, while on the other hand, valuedriven company cultures can promote caregiving.

LEADERSHIP STYLE AND ROLE OF MANAGEMENT

Implementing work-life balance policies will be different for managers in hierarchical or in more informally-led organisations. The common denominator is a sensitive and open-minded middle management.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON BARRIERS MALE CARERS ENCOUNTER IN COMPANIES ACROSS EUROPE?

Below the barriers found in the Men in Care study (2021) are explained.6

COMPANY CULTURES WITH GENDER STEREOTYPES





We found expectations that women should sacrifice their professional career to perform care responsibilities while men should not. Men's care responsibilities can be limited to taking children to school, to extra-curricular activities in the evenings or helping in their leisure activities. Internalised stereotypes are seen as an important obstacle to choosing to use work-life balance policies, even if they are accessible. The "barriers in the heads of men" have been emphasised in many of the companies we have studied. In other words, the gender division of care and gender stereotypes is reflected in the company culture. It seems that the workplace is often perceived as having a masculinity contest where men need to prove to be "real men". Such pressure on men to live up to a certain masculinity and to secure economic resources reveals how gender is constituted through the practices and organisational culture. In practice, men are not supported so they can take full advantage of work-life balance policies.

INSECURITY AND CARER'S PENALTY



Male workers admitted that they feared being penalised or replaced, and that this impeded them from taking care leave or complying with work-life balance policies. They were also afraid that due to their potential absence during care or parental leave their position would be taken by their substitute.

In a working environment where work expectations seem unclear or are perceived as limitless, male workers may be reluctant to undertake care responsibilities, and they are more prone to accepting after-hour meetings and e-mails because this is what "ambitious workers" would do to prove their commitment to the company, even if the companies do not expect them to follow such practices.

In many companies one of the biggest barriers was the fixed meeting hours – both internal meetings and ones with external partners. Meetings or obligatory schedules early in the morning or late in the afternoon prevent men from being involved in care work. A number of male workers reported an emotional conflict. They wanted to take their child to kindergarten or school, but also wanted to be present at early-morning meetings which they perceived as essential for planning the workday at the office and for having all employees together.

WORKING TIME



LACK OF AWARENESS OF MEASURES

Our study found that many male workers were not aware of their rights as carers, and they demonstrated a lack of solid knowledge about the measures they were entitled to. This is evident in the following statement which also points out the lack of reflection on the value of such leave for men:

There was no reflection on what it [parental leave sharing] means to me as an employee, to my career, but also to me on the psychological level, to my personal development. I know this is an individual decision, a family decision. (...) But there should be reflection on it and awareness of it. I talked to my colleagues, and they were surprised that it's possible to share parental leave or take it together. I would like our staff and employers to be more aware of this.

A similar opinion was expressed by another worker we interviewed:

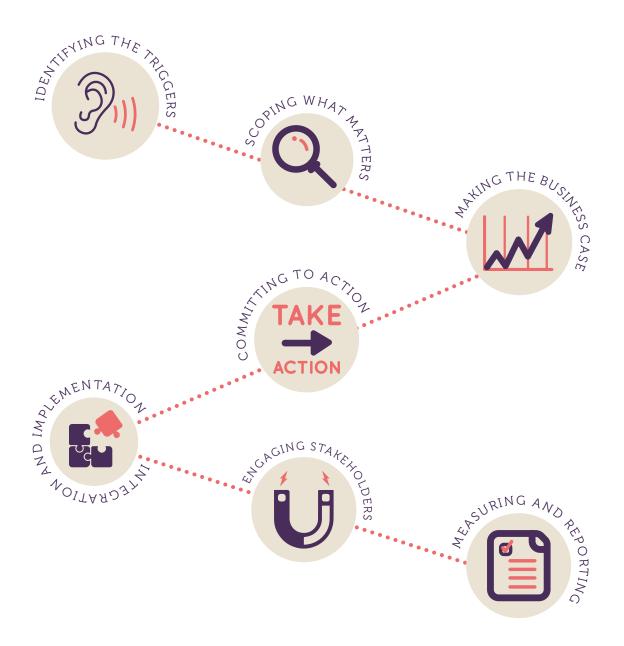
He changed departments recently, or actually had a new boss, and he wasn't sure if he was allowed to work from home [...], you know, he had a sore back the other day and I said "why don't you just work from home, you have the screen and the keyboard and..." and he was like "...ah I don't know if it's tolerated in the new department".

In this context several informants report that caring masculinities were constrained by a lack of clear and effective communication which could facilitate the use of work-life balance policies. Only in some cases had the HR departments or managers made initiatives to inform the workers about their rights through guides for workers, newsletters or workshops. The lack of such an approach and resources may indicate the absence of male carers on the companies' agendas: men are often not targeted as the recipients of the measures due to assumed gender beliefs embedded in traditional, patriarchal gender roles. From the male perspective, it can be argued that men's lack of knowledge about their rights may indicate their lack of interest in these solutions, either because they do not need them, or they do not find them relevant in terms of reconciling professional work with care. As a result, the inclusion of caring masculinities may not even be discussed.

7 STEPS ON HOW TO SUPPORT MALE CARERS

The following seven steps from the **Men in Care project** are based on our own study in 21 companies⁶ and Grayson's Seven steps to being a good employer for working carers (2017)⁷.

We believe that the seven steps described here are also applicable for carers of all genders, even though our study and the project have targeted men.⁸





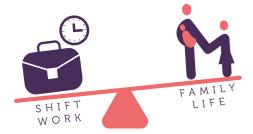
What are the triggers in your company?

What is a good challenge to start with?

What makes it difficult for workers to reconcile work and care commitments?

What are the pressure points for male caregivers in your company?

For several companies the starting point was working-time arrangements that workers found inflexible, where it was difficult to combine work with care commitments. In one company, for example, the evening shift of the shift rotation was identified as devastating to the family life of workers with young children.



Gender imbalance and lack of diversity in staff or leadership were an additional motivation for many of the companies to improve the situation for working carers of all genders.

POSSIBLE TRIGGERS IN YOUR COMPANY

- \cdot Fathers do not use their entire entitlement to parental/paternity leave or cannot use it according to their caregiving needs (full-time to take turns with mothers).
- \cdot Workers leave or change positions after returning from care or parental leave. This is often the reason why companies lose qualified female workers.
- \cdot A culture where overtime and overwork are accepted without scrutiny. This often sets a standard for an unhealthy working environment.
- · High turnover.
- · High levels of unscheduled absenteeism.
- · Gender gap in part-time work and reduced working hours with lower promotion rates.9
- ·Themes or issues tabled by workers or the trade union.
- The company wants to redefine its goals and values as a caring employer.



STEP 2

Scoping what matters - Needs Analysis

After the company has identified a trigger or chosen its point of departure, the next step is to make a broader and systematic assessment of what makes it difficult and what helps various workers to reconcile work and care commitments. All the above-mentioned trigger points can be included in the assessment.

It is important to have a process where trade unions, workers of all genders with different care responsibilities and management on different levels are included. The process of making this kind of assessment should not be a one-off exercise.

HOW CAN THE NEEDS OF CARERS BE MET

What kind of informal practices are already provided in the company? Which of these are effective and could easily be formalised? Are there examples and inspirations from other similar companies that seem applicable to your context?

In making a needs analysis, retrieving age and gender distribution figures from key statistics is recommended:

- · Take Up And Number Of Days Used Of Parental /Care Leave
- · Position After Returning From Parental/Care Leave
- · Use Of Sick Days / Care For Children
- · Part-Time / Full-Time Positions
- · Use Of Home Office
- · Number And Percentage Of Eligible/All Workers On Flexible Work Schedule

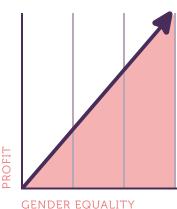
The increased use of home office and teleworking since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 has shown drawbacks that also need to be included in the needs assessment. Workers often experience blurred lines between working time and leisure time that may result in invisible overwork. This raises issues such as having procedures for communication, digital and physical availability and the new gender gap, equal job opportunities and promotion possibilities for teleworkers and office workers.



STEP 3

Making the business case

The companies in the Men in Care study that excel with a good work-life balance policy, as well as high levels of gender equality, are also economically successful companies. Arguments beyond fairness and social responsibility aren't needed to implement a positive workplace for carers. Nevertheless, the business argument is also solid, and inquiring about benefits for your company may be helpful for policy implementation.



Let us concentrate on just a few points as most that can be summed up in a cost-benefit analysis have already been mentioned in the introduction to this guide.

LOWER RECRUITMENT COSTS

Many carers reduce their hours of work or quit their job to provide care. Employers therefore lose the knowledge, skills and experience that the employee has developed over time and will need to replace the worker.

DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

If your company policies single out workers and managers for recruitment and promotion who are willing to "sacrifice" everything (family, friends, spare time), you will miss out on a diverse pool of qualified personnel.

RETAIN OLDER WORKERS

Since one of the significant reasons for senior workers leaving the workplace is to care for a partner, parents or to care for one's own health, supporting working carers will help keep senior workers in work, and thus not losing out on the value of their experience and knowledge.

REDUCE RISK OF COSTLY SECURITY BREACHES / EVENTS

In many male - dominated companies and sectors (travel, energy), high turnover and overwork represent a health risk for workers and a security risk for the companies.



After the mapping and analysis process, the next step for you as an employer is to commit to supporting carers of all genders. This may be in connection with a plan or strategy for work-life balance, for gender equality or in a collective agreement. It is of essence that the company's commitment or plan explicitly targets men as carers to ensure that male workers are informed of policies, and that they take parental leave and perform other care tasks. If not, this target is often missed because, as mentioned, care and gender equality are more often associated with women. Gender experts and workers' representatives must be taken on board to agree on concrete measures that should be included in new collective agreements and normative frames in the company.

Rather than just mirroring national minimum standards of work-life balance policies, you as employer should lead in the development (see inventory of work-life balance policies). You should stimulate a higher rate of care leave (such as parental leave) across departments and managerial positions.

BASED ON YOUR NEEDS ANALYSIS, YOU SHOULD PROMOTE CARE-RELATED WORK MODELS









Many carers need to shorten the time spent away from home or combine working hours with kindergarten/school hours, hence policies such as unbroken shifts and morning shifts can be helpful.

A KEY AREA FOR INTERVENTION IS WORKING TIME

Overwork and long working hours often lead to "othering" and exoticisation of workers who need to limit work time for care reasons. Introducing policies to reduce overtime and to implement a normal workweek for all is an important consideration. Currently, some companies are taking this a step further by trying out a four-day work week (32 hours) or a reduction of the workday within a five-day work week (35 hours), while staying on the same pay level.

LEADERS SHOULD COMMIT TO ACTION BY EXAMPLE

In our study we found that some men feel uneasy about disclosing and talking about their care responsibilities. Managers and leaders who are willing to talk about their own caregiving roles are needed, and they also need to openly take advantage of their own organisation's carer policies, such as using parental leave, flexible working hours, home office and so on.











INVENTORY OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

INVENTORI OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE POLICIES
Compressed Working Hours
Flexible Working Hours
Annualised Working Hours
Parental/Paternity/Maternity/ Care Leaves
Adaptation Of Shifts To Care Needs
Adaptation of Shirts to Care Needs
Policy To Reduce Overtime/Overwork
Remote Working / Home Office
32-35 Hour Work Week With Same Salary
Job Sharing
Phased Retirement

Information Help And Other Support Specifically Targeting Carers

STEP 5 Integration and implementation

In the **Men in Care** study, an overwhelming number of informants (male carers) stressed the point that superiors and senior management are critical for successful balancing of working life and care. As mentioned, many caregivers are reluctant to raise issues of conflicting care tasks with their manager in the first place. Workers, and male workers in particular, might worry that they will not be seen as a reliable, devoted employee. Much depends on the attitudes and behaviours of managers to unlock the full potential of flexible working hours without working extra hours. It is not, however, just a question of the attitudes and behaviour of the manager, it is also a question of implementation of managerial tasks.

IN ANNUAL APPRAISAL REVIEWS

HR/career development of companies should always have at least one question about their workers' work-life balance situation in the annual appraisal review, preferably formulated as an open question, such as:

How do you think your job here has matched your obligations in other areas of life in the past year?

Is there anything we can do to accommodate the needs you have when it comes to care work?

THE PLANNING OF PARENTAL LEAVE

When workers are planning to take full-time parental leave, we advise superiors to openly approach their worker in a designated meeting to discuss his leave, how long it will be, how/if he would like the worker (not) to reach out or contact him during his leave (e.g. for outings with the team, social gatherings), to make a plan for his substitution when he is on leave and to consider the workload plan for his team.

PROCEDURE FOR KEEPING TRACK OF WORKING HOURS AND OVERWORK

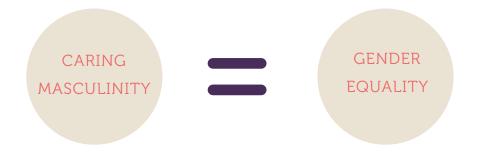
As mentioned above, overtime work has harmful health consequences, especially for workers with substantial care commitments. The company should have procedures for monitoring working hours and overtime, and for managers to step in and find solutions. Workers we interviewed in the **Men in Care** study appreciated managers who were able to see if and when they were overworked and stepped in and addressed the situation.

TRAINING

Male carers want managers who are aware of their life at home and their obligations to take care of children. But often managers are not sensitive to the needs of carers and working-environment conditions that would meet these needs. They may not have small children, be committed to a substantial care task or recognise care as relevant to the company or business. So, for managers to adequately approach and lead carers, they need support and training. A first step is an introduction to common challenges and barriers to working carers (sensitivity training).



In our study we found that many managers and workers do not really see how men taking care of children or others is related to gender equality. A caring masculinity opposes traditional masculinity, which is based on the sacrifice of women and the subordination of their employment position to that of their partner. Mutual benefits of gender equality and men taking a caring role should be pointed out more clearly in policy and communication. A stakeholder seminar could be held that is especially dedicated to reflecting on hegemonic masculinity, gender stereotypes, the division of domestic and care work and the need for men to step up to achieve gender equality.



The relative freedom of workers in many modern workplaces can make it difficult for workers to manage their own work tasks, to limit workload and keep work from invading other parts of life. In response many employers offer company coaching or self-management courses. But often the problems go beyond the scope of the individual worker; too much total workload, lack of transparency on decisions made, and so on. The implementation of self-management and coaching measures should therefore be monitored and assessed to make sure they do not place a burden on the workers for problems that are really on the company level.

INFORMATION

A key part of implementation is to help managers and workers to understand and be aware of the companies' policies on work-life balance, and support of carers and equal opportunities.

Collective agreements, a gender and diversity plan and every relevant policy should be described on the company website/intranet. Some companies also stressed the importance of a guide for new employees where all policies and measures are described. With an elaborate description of the various policies, each worker can select or use them to adjust to current care needs and consider a variety of workplaces/positions.

Since we find that many men do not informally share and discuss care arrangements with co-workers, having good formal information is vitally important. Information that is targeted specifically for men is also advised (images, icons and language). Here policies on paternity leave and leave to care for a partner or sick parent can be in focus.

To highlight the availability of parental/paternity leave for men in the company you can make an image campaign on fathering, for example, where you get fathers in the company out from behind the curtain and on to the company website or intranet.









We find that in the daily information flow in companies, policies on work-life balance could be shared more often, for instance added to the regular monthly staff meeting agenda.

EXPERT POINT OF CONTACT

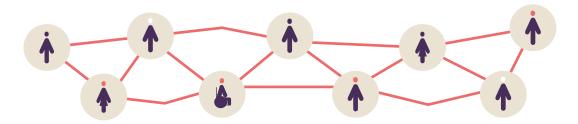
Workers and managers in medium- and large-sized companies should have a single point of contact to find and discuss detailed information about company and national policies on caregiving and work-life balance policies. Often this is the HR office. Trade union representatives can also be such an expert point of contact for workers and managers, especially when there are differences in opinion.



STEP 6 Engaging stakeholders – Networks and Community

Facilitating or joining networks can be useful in building a culture of care within the company.

External networks and initiatives on inclusion, diversity, HR and gender equality can be helpful for the exchange of information, debates and the search for new measures and solutions. Experts and networks with specialist knowledge are also often needed as consultants in particular situations involving care; such as supporting workers who are providing care for someone with dementia.



It is also important to create space in the company for men to discuss their engagement in care. Employers in medium- and large-sized companies can encourage the development of fathers' groups and networks of male caregivers, thus better engaging men in networks around wellbeing and mental health, parental networks and networks of male workers caring for sick, disabled or elderly relatives. Carers' networks are important for workers of all genders to share experiences and get emotional support. Carer networks are also helpful for identifying common obstacles carers face in the company and for suggesting collective solutions.

Carer networks within the company must be widely promoted through internal newsletters for workers, the intranet and news websites. Face-to-face workshops and online webinars can be arranged, one-to-one support can be given and so on. It is important that senior members of staff join, sponsor or are visible in the network, which will give it added credibility.

Companies in the **Men in Care** study organised social events for families to meet in a relaxed setting because such meetings could further develop empathy and understanding when it comes to using measures related to care.



Say your company has set goals to support male carers and carers of all genders and has put actions into motion. The company and you as an employer, human resources, gender experts or workers' representatives should then learn from experience and look for answers to key questions:

What results have the implemented policies had?

How many of the managers and workers have used them?

What is the status across departments and managerial levels?

In this step you need to update statistics and knowledge in focal areas, see Steps 1 and 2 above

Yearly employee-surveys on working environments can be an additional valuable source of information about the status quo. It is recommended to include questions about work-life balance, care needs, self-care and overwork.

This kind of update (Step 7) about the company support for carers should be undertaken annually in collaboration with all stakeholders. It can be done as a part of reporting on a plan or strategy for work-life balance, gender equality or diversity. In the report, employers should provide evidence that they satisfy criteria in four areas:

COMPANY POLICY

Concepts of work-life balance, care and self-care are recognised in collective agreements, HR policies or other procedures. Men as carers are explicitly targeted and mentioned.

WORKPLACE SUPPORT

Carers can have access to practical workplace support and information about public policies, external and internal support and services.

COMMUNICATION, AWARENESS RAISING AND TRAINING

Policies and available support are communicated to all managers and workers.

PEER SUPPORT

Carers are supported in engaging with other caregivers.

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WORKPLACE SUPPORT FOR CARING MASCULINITIES



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