# Manual for Employers:

# Take Care of Working Carers with Special Considerations for Men Carers

## Men in care

WORKPLACE SUPPORT FOR CARING MASCULINITIES

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## ABOUT MIC PROJECT

Men in Care is a European 3-year project (March 2019 - September 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, co-workers and friends. MiC partners are: National Distance Education University (project coordinator, Spain), Fundación 1 de Mayo (Spain), Verein für Männer- und 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  in Kraków (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.

## TERMS OF USE

## EDITING AND LAYOUT

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# CONTENT _____

# 1  INTRODUCTION: WHY CARE FOR CARERS?

Caring is a normal part of life – it is fundamental to the human condition. In addition to caring for children, the sick and the elderly, care also involves the daily physical, emotional and social maintenance of families and individuals, i.e. the renewal of the workforce and the reproduction of people. Therefore, the economy and the family, or the sphere of work and the sphere of personal life are by no means two separate spheres, but are closely intertwined and interdependent.

Caring is a widespread and diverse experience. For instance, the majority of people caring for parents are aged between 45 and 64 and they are juggling work and care. Many of these employees are at peak of their careers and among the organisations' most skilled people. It has been estimated that 20 million people across the EU provide over 20 hours weekly of unpaid informal care work (approx. 10 million people provide 35+ hours of informal care), more than 5 years in average (dementia 10 years, disabled children life-term). OECD study (2011) found that one in 10 adults in OECD countries was involved in informal unpaid family care. Informal caring, though rewarding, takes its toll on carers' wellbeing which impacts on work. As the pension age increases, the likelihood of caring during working life is increasing. With a view of **demographic trends** in the EU, taking care of working carers means acting inclusively to the ageing and multi-generational employees (i.e. parents, sandwich generation, young-old caring for old-old, disability).

Most of the employees have **life stages** when they have to juggle their job with caring for either small children or elderly parents, sick partner, relatives, friends. A growing number of employees have both childcare and eldercare responsibilities (i.e. sandwich generation). Sometimes, caring can be a short episodic burst, sometimes caring is long-term and the amount of caring progressively increases. Yet, **caring still remains a hidden issue in the workplace**, with many working carers feeling lonely or isolated, because they do not feel comfortable talking about their caring responsibilities at work. They feel like they are the only person in this situation (Employers for carers 2015).

**What is the impact of caring on working carers?** The main challenges of caring for working carers are financial, physical and emotional. For most carers, the lack of access to sufficient periods of carers' leave and low financial replacement rates brings with it the need to reduce working hours, leading to a loss in income, pension entitlements and often career progression. Combining work with informal caring also leads to increase in stress, fatigue and physical ill health resulting from deterioration in work-life balance combined with the emotional impact of caring. This is particularly true of elder care which is physically and emotionally more demanding compared to childcare. A minority of carers are driven to leave their job entirely, bringing with it severe financial penalties with long-term consequences leading to poverty and the loss of the social network. This can be bad for their employers too because of the loss of experienced and talented staff, employees' loyalty, diversity and institutional memory as well as higher recruitment costs. In addition, society in general is losing competences and skills of active population. For those carers who find themselves exiting the labour market altogether to fulfil a caring role, negotiation re-entry can be difficult, particularly if the period of caring was an extended one. The longer people stay out of employment because of their caring responsibilities, the less likely they will be able to return to employment when their caring role ends.

Supporting carers to combine work and care is critical for improving the quality of life of carers and, besides the state's and the local community's provision of care services, employers are central to this. This resonates in the definition of **corporate responsibility**, i.e. the responsibility which an organisation has for its wider social, environmental and economic impacts. Its key part is the impact on employees – being a responsible and good quality employer.

These guidelines are for employers who want to understand the societal and business case for supporting employees with caring responsibilities. A complementing guide focusing on male carers and companies is also available (Humer, Frelih et. al 2021).

# 2 THE BUSINESS CASE

The company is increasingly perceived not as a closed entity that competes with the domain of personal life but is instead an open system connected to its environment and is therefore involved in social, cultural, ethical and political changes. Organisations that can offer more flexibility and reduced working time, caregiving leaves and adaptable career patterns will have a competitive edge in recruiting and retaining as the aging workforce and dual focus on personal and professional lives among younger employees become an increasingly important driver in the labour market. Worker's provider and caregiver roles affect absenteeism and life satisfaction, which in turn affects job performance. It is in the interest of employers to develop family-friendly programs and policies to support employees' multiple social roles.

Here are some **costs** related to neglecting the issues of working carers:

| | |
|---|---|
| **LOST PRODUCTIVITY** | Working carers report higher stress, increased absences, less ability to work full-time or overtime, travel for work or take advantage of career-advancing opportunities, lower productivity, and more interruptions at work. |
| **RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION COSTS** | Some carers reduce their hours of work; other quit the job in order to provide care. Employers lose the knowledge, skills and experience that the employee has developed over time and will need to replace the worker. It was estimated that it may cost the equivalent of 3-months' salary to replace a low-skilled worker and more than a year's salary to replace a professional. |
| **THE WIDENING SKILL GAP** | Employer may lose workers with specific skills, which are in deficit at the labour market, therefore supporting working carers can be part of a strategy of hiring, and retaining the workers who will give them competitive advantage. |
| **LOSING GENDER DIVERSITY** | Losing of gender diversity of the employees, because more women than men leave work due to their higher involvement in child and elderly care. |
| **MISSING THE VALUE OF THE AGEING WORKFORCE** | Since one of the significant reasons for older workers leaving the job is to care for a partner or parents, supporting working carers will help keep older workers in work. |

In contrast, providing a supportive working environment for working carers brings **benefits** to employers:

ATTRACTS AND RETAINS STAFF

REDUCES STRESS

REDUCES SICK LEAVE

IMPROVES SERVICE DELIVERY

INCREASES STAFF MORALE

PRODUCES COST SAVINGS

INCREASES RESILIENCY AND PRODUCTIVITY

INCREASES GENDER DIVERSITY

REDUCES RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING COSTS

PROMOTES EMPLOYEES COMMITMENT WITH THE COMPANY

IMPROVES PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

# 3 THE CASE OF GENDER EQUALITY

Caring represents a **wider gender impact for society**, as the majority of intensive carers are women. Studies highlight the disproportionate care burden placed on women in modern society, men's insufficient involvement in care work and the associated inequalities women then face in the labour market. Even though women in Europe have on average higher education than men, women with caring responsibilities are more likely to be underemployed, take career breaks, take on part-time or casual work, often in lower-paying jobs, they refuse career advancement in favour of care – all of which can hold them back from progressing at work. In addition to inequalities, it also means wasted potential for women, for work organisations and for society as a whole. Such situation above all is calling for strengthening the public provision of care, but it is also addressing men to engage more in care work, while employers are challenged to establish conditions that support informal carers.

# 4 MASCULINITY AND CARE: MEN AS WORKING CARERS

There is a lot of **complexity in men's caring involvement**. Care work is stereotypically associated with femininity, dependency, emotionality as the opposite of masculinity. Social norms of masculinity stipulate that status and power, which are linked to a position in paid work, are important sources of men's valuation and self-esteem. This leads to strong male identifications with work, which brings men clear advantages (i.e. higher income, less unpaid work, domination in the decision making bodies) or what can be called 'patriarchal dividends' in the spheres of work, economics and politics. At the same time, these privileges also come with **costs to masculinity**, such as impoverished intimate relationships, overperforming and competitiveness, risky behaviour, neglect of one's health, violence, shorter life expectancy, and higher rates of suicidality and addiction compared to women, which in large part can be seen as a one-sided socialisation patterns towards toughness, paid labour and non-caring.

Men find it difficult to seek support in their work organisation when they have caring responsibilities - because they are afraid this might be understood as an admission of their weakness or they think it contradicts the norms of masculinity that dictate autonomy, control, self-confidence and mastery of the situation. Men often perceive caregiving as a personal problem; they underestimate its burdens and adopt a heroic 'I can do it myself' attitude. They are worried about being ridiculed by colleagues for doing 'women's work'; they fear that employers will no longer regard them as reliable, competent and competitive (Gärtner et al. 2021). However, empirical evidence proves that **men increasingly want to be more involved in family life**, but they do not feel supported by their employers to do so (Scambor et al. 2013). Many men are still penalised when they do not fit the masculine ideal of the devoted worker unencumbered by family responsibilities. Often employers actually react differently when women or men seek support to reconcile work and care.

For instance, men who go part-time for parenthood are more stigmatised than women; or it seems strange for a man to take sick leave because of a sick child. Fathers often experience their requests for flexible working hours because of childcare being turned down. In some organisations, it is a problem to take several months of paternity or parental leave. Despite the introduction of paternity leave and shared parental leave, there is still a persistent stigma against men taking long periods off, and fathers who choose to care for their new-borns face significant barriers (Gärtner et al. 2021). Caring responsibilities do not only apply to parents. In informal elder care, there are on average 25% to 30% of male caregivers (OECD 2011) who prevail in care for their partners with chronical illness. There is also increasing research evidence of men in a primary caregiving situation (Russel 2007, Frelih 2019), when men have no choice but to take over intensive care responsibilities (e.g. being a single parent or taking care of a parent or a partner with dementia) and provide all necessary caring activities from routine household work through to intimate personal care. Nevertheless, the ideal worker norm continues to reinforce men's identification with work, and men who want to take a more active role in caring experience similar or even stronger discrimination and segregation in work environments as women. If this resentment continues to build, employers that do not adapt will lose out.

Addressing men's caring responsibilities is therefore important for changing organisational cultures, for the emancipation of men, for gender equality within organisations and in society more broadly, and because many men want to take care and do care. Supporting all those with caring responsibilities – not just women but also men, not just parents but those caring for elderly, sick and disabled – will enable employers to benefit from a wealth of skills and experience from men and women of all ages. This is particularly important as more people stay in work for longer yet continue to have caring responsibilities – and in some cases may have multiple caring roles.

# 5  HOW EMPLOYERS CAN TAKE CARE OF THEIR EMPLOYEE CARERS

Organisations which support their working carers identify their employee carers (men and women), offer flexible time schedules and home working, care leave, support internal networks of employee carers, provide advice and information, etc. There is no single template on what will work for every organisation, but three common pillars are: leadership by example, supportive and empowered line management, flexibility to changing individual circumstances.

*The Employers for Carers* organisation developed some tips on how employers can support employees who are carers.

## INTRODUCE A CARERS' POLICY

Employers can put in place a policy on carers to demonstrate their support and set out the practical arrangements that are in place for carers. Employers should also ensure that relevant policies and procedures (for example those on flexible working) include care issues within their remit. The existence of the carers' policy and other relevant policies should be communicated regularly to the workforce, some of whom will be carers. It is also important to take steps to raise awareness of the organisation's support for carers. For example, via a poster campaign or leaflets circulated with payslips or during special events.

## TRAIN LINE MANAGERS TO SUPPORT CARERS

Line managers are essential to making a carers' policy work and are likely to have an impact on a carer's ability to balance the demands of work and care. Therefore, it is a good idea to provide training for line managers on supporting carers and adopting an understanding attitude. The training should cover issues such as what caring is, why carers should be supported, what employers have to do and what they should do, and identifying carers and communicating with them.

## ALLOW CARERS TO WORK FLEXIBLY

Providing flexible working arrangements is one of the key ways that an employer can support carers in the workplace. Having policies on flexible working that go beyond the law can benefit carers. For example, a formal procedure for making flexible working requests can help employers to be more responsive to carers' needs. Flexible working arrangements that could benefit carers include giving time and private space to make personal telephone calls, flexible start and/or finish times, homeworking, annual accounts of working hours and similar.

## BE FLEXIBLE WHEN CARERS NEED LEAVE AT SHORT NOTICE

Employers can support employees with caring responsibilities by offering flexible leave arrangements. Flexible leave can help a carer to manage a crisis or when they need to take a longer period off work to care for someone. While all employees have the right to take a reasonable amount of time off work for dependants, employers can offer carers dealing with a crisis support that goes beyond this statutory entitlement. For example, employers could pay employees when they take time off for dependants or give them the ability to make up the time later. Employers could also offer carers the opportunity to take an extended period of leave.

## PROVIDE INFORMATION AND PEER-TO-PEER SUPPORT

Employers can provide information to carers about what workplace and external support is available and how to access it. This could be included in a carer's guide that pulls all key information on caring together. Employers can also support carers by setting up and directing employees to peer-to-peer support groups.

## CARING FOR WORKING CARERS SHOULD BE PART OF KEY ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES:

· Creating a diverse and inclusive workplace

· Talent attraction, retention and optimisation in the context of an ageing workforce

· Being a socially responsible employers

· Enabling health and wellbeing in the workplace

· Being a great place to work

· Building employee engagement and advocacy

· Building organisational resilience

· Enabling sustainability through reducing costs and raising productivity

## 6   CARING JOURNEY AND DIFFERENT NEEDS OF WORKING CARERS IN THIS JOURNEY

*(relevant for employers and working carers)*

When working parents are easy for employers to spot, carers of parents, grandparents, partners or siblings come in a variety of different situations and often feel uncomfortable talking about their private lives at work. A clear definition who is a carer should be set up in carer's policy. These are employees responsible for the care and support of children, disabled, elderly or sick parents, partners, relatives, friends, who are unable to care for themselves. They have significant caring responsibilities that have a substantial impact on their working lives.

The following framework enables for understanding specific situations and needs of working carers and how they evolve within a caring process.

### WHEN:

| | |
|---|---|
| WE FIRST START TO LOOK AFTER SOMEONE | CHILDREN GROW UP OR THE PERSON YOU ARE CARING FOR HAS TO MOVE TO A RESIDENTIAL HOME |
| WE FIRST NEED TO SEEK EXTERNAL HELP/ ADVICE FROM A HEALTH OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL ON BEHALF OF THE PERSON BEING LOOKED AFTER | PAID CARE HAS TO BE INTRODUCED INTO THE HOME OF THE PERSON BEING CARED FOR |
| YOU HAVE TO SEEK HELP AT WORK | END OF LIFE CARE |
| YOU HAVE TO TAKE REDUCED WORKING HOURS OR GIVE UP WORK ENTIRELY | THE CARING JOURNEY IS OVER |

**WHEN WE FIRST START TO LOOK AFTER SOMEONE**:
We need time and flexibility to make alternative caring arrangements, as well as conditions-specific guidance on likely progress of the person cared for; advice on being personally resilient and looking after our own health and well-being; advice and information; carer network for peer-to-peer support.

**WHEN WE FIRST NEED TO SEEK EXTERNAL HELP/ADVICE FROM A HEALTH OR OTHER PROFESSIONAL ON BEHALF OF THE PERSON BEING LOOKED AFTER:**
How to be recognized formally as carer etc. Emergency circumstances can result in an employee needing short periods of time off with little notice; this may require understanding and practical support from managers and colleagues.

**WHEN YOU HAVE TO SEEK HELP AT WORK:**
An increase in caring responsibilities may change an employee's personal circumstances and therefore they may need more flexibility or a change in work patterns, whether this is for a short while or for a long time, so they need options for flexible working and leave possibilities.

**WHEN YOU HAVE TO TAKE REDUCED WORKING HOURS OR GIVE UP WORK ENTIRELY:**
Financial advice, for example for future pension; keeping in touch and up-skilled during career break; option of freelance work.

**WHEN PAID CARE HAS TO BE INTRODUCED INTO THE HOME OF THE PERSON BEING CARED FOR:**
Professional help to source qualified care and funding options; help with emergency care when usual care arrangement breaks down.

**WHEN CHILDREN GROW UP OR THE PERSON YOU ARE CARING FOR HAS TO MOVE TO A RESIDENTIAL HOME:**
Options for returning to work; help with re-skilling and re-integrating at work.

**END OF LIFE CARE:**
Emergency and compassionate leave.

**WHEN THE CARING JOURNEY IS OVER:**
Coping with bereavement, work re-entry, getting co-workers and managers to re-frame how they see you. For some former carers, passing on their carer knowledge, for example, through employer's carer network, can be an important part of gaining closure and optimising the positive impact of their own learning.

For some carers needs may be very basic, such as leaving work on time or accessing a phone for personal use. Some may require flexible work arrangements on an ongoing, temporary or sporadic basis.

Generally, care for caring workers includes some of the following elements at the workplace:

- A supportive culture that recognizes and accommodates employees who have caring responsibilities

- Information for employees and managers about carer-friendly policies and entitlements under relevant legislation or agreements

- A free or subsidised counselling service

- Information for employees and managers about external assistance, such as carer support organisations and types of daycare centres, after-school care

- Flexible work arrangements such as flexitime, part-time, job sharing, flexible rostering or compressed hours

- Leave provisions such as paid maternal, paternal, parental, personal or carer's leave, unpaid leave, flexible use of recreation leave or a leave donation scheme allowing staff to donate unused leave to carers

- Working from home temporarily, sporadically or long-term

- Access to computers and phones for personal use

# 7   SEVEN STEPS TO BEING A GOOD EMPLOYER FOR WORKING CARERS
*(according to Grayson 2017)*

It is important that organisational steps for supporting working carers are shaped in a gender-inclusive way, that they explicitly address men and prevent reinforcing existing gender inequalities in caring.

## STEP 1
### Identifying the triggers

The trigger for the employers to start to consider the needs of their employee carers might be internal or external, top-down or bottom-up. It could be an analysis of unscheduled absenteeism or employees departure statistics; the ideas tabled by employees or trade union, individual employee's case; forecasting actual/projected skills shortages and concerns about loss of experienced workers; redefinition of organisational purpose to be a responsible and responsive employer or new legislation.

## STEP 2
### Scoping what matters

Which staff are employee carers and which staff is about to become a carer? Often caregivers do not self-identify and may not think to raise the issue with their line manager in the first place. Some employees may be very reluctant to disclose their personal circumstances and they do not want to expose themselves as having family caring responsibilities. Partly it is also because employees are concerned that they will not be seen as a reliable, devoted worker because of their caring responsibilities. They may fear it will have a negative impact on their careers; that, for example, they will no longer be considered for promotion, or they fear of job security or stigma. **Men are more reluctant then women to discuss their caregiving responsibilities at work** and there are gender reasons for that (they may see it as a sign of weakness to ask for help; afraid of being mocked by colleagues for doing 'women's' care work;

losing out on competitiveness and promotion options etc.). Employer may add in a question during employees' performance evaluation or one-on-one annual meetings. By asking a question about care related responsibilities, an employer is not only opening up avenues to support them, but also may be helping them to see they are in fact a caregiver. Having a clear definition what it means to be a carer is important.

*Good practice example: Some employers use* **carers' register**. *Workers who look after a parent, child, relative or friend who cannot manage without help because they are physically or mentally ill, frail or disabled, can apply for the register. Welfare officer assesses each individual's caring responsibilities, and placement on the carer register provides entitlement to a range of supports and benefits. While employees are encouraged to discuss this with their line manager, there is no requirement to disclose the nature of caring responsibilities with the manager. Some firms use anonymized on-line registering which is fully open for employees to update at any time. It is not mandatory to provide information which they do not want to reveal.*

Not knowing about their employees' responsibilities creates a dilemma for employers, however **employees' surveys** need to be conducted sensitively. They should show the extent of the caring that employees are doing and the costs to the business of the avoidable loss of talent when employee carers quit. What are the main challenges that employee carers are facing? What do the existing informal practices already provide? Which of these are effective and could easily be formalised? To identify needs related to informal care in the company employer may circulate a leaflet, publish an article in the company's newsletter and then send out a questionnaire for employees. Before deciding on what system of identification would be appropriate, employers might discuss this with employees and clearly explain the motives for gathering information. The reality is that identifying employees who are carers is not a one-off exercise. A combination of staff turnover and the reality that new carers are starting caring all the time means that the exercise of identifying working carers needs to be carried out at regular intervals. Identification should also include **needs analysis** as a base for developing carers' supportive organisational policy.

## STEP 3
### Making the business case

**Direct cost-benefit analysis:** how supportive measures will contribute to the company's good reputation, reduced workplace stress, improved retention of experienced people, higher customer's satisfaction, lower recruitment costs, higher employees' morale, creativity and productivity. How taking care of working carers makes **existing HR policies** (like diversity and inclusion, health and wellbeing, reducing workplace stress, increasing employees' engagement) more effective and better joined-up.

## STEP 4
### Committing to action

This may involve carer-proofing existing policies and rising awareness about their relevance for carers - or the development of **specific carers' policy** that includes clear definition of carers, conditions of disclosing and provisions such as part-time, flex, remote working, care leaves, information help and other supports targeting specifically carers. It is important of not just having carers' specific provisions but also **fostering a workplace culture** in which employees feel comfortable using them. Therefore, key part of committing to action is that the leaders of the organisation make clear their commitment and personally champion their organisations commitment to working carers. It is even better if business leaders are willing to talk about their own caring roles – and best if some leaders are very publicly to take advantage of their own organisation's caring policy, to work part-time temporarily or take a short-term leave of absence (**the role of male leaders would be prominent here!**).

## STEP 5
### Integration and implementation

There are two aspects of how employers can help: firstly by enabling staff with caring responsibilities to manage their work responsibilities more easily and secondly by supporting them in their caring role.

> **Possible measures and policy arrangements:** some form of flexible options for tele-working/working from home; annualised working hours, job rotation, term-time working (working contracted hours but within school-term times), self-rostering (team voluntarily agree shift patterns), job sharing, split shifts, compressed working hours, flexible combination, day extender, phased retirement; enhanced leave arrangements (emergency leave, career breaks or sabbatical, specific carer leave, unpaid leave, matched leave (to match annual leave), compassionate leave; advice and information, access to experts to assess dependents and to help source/finance professional care services; access to free/subsidised support technology and emergency backup care, respite care; peer-to-peer support networks.

Employers should improve implementation through **line-management training**, because much depends on the attitudes and behaviours of line managers, who are recognized as the key to unlocking the full potential of flexible working. But to do this they need training to develop skills around managing different working patterns, building trust with their teams, and also, to be able not to judge carers, in particular men based on gender stereotypes,

when they need working adjustments because of their care needs. There are also some psychological challenges in dealing with returning, ex-carers for some line managers, like "this person hasn't been interested for the last few years in developing their career. Now they are again. As their line manager, I have to rethink how I view them." In practice, this is a similar situation to those returning from parental leave or long-term leave due to illness. Part of the training for line-manager aims to alert them to stress symptoms that they might see in workers, explicitly including those arising from being a carer. The course may train managers to intimate conversations with their colleagues, including exploring what might be the causes of stress. In practice, reduced working time or unpaid leave is often the last thing that working carers want (also because of earnings). What works better is showing understanding of the individual position, allowing them the flexibility to leave a bit earlier, take a few hours off work, or to work from home. People who need greater flexibility in their working patterns do not want to feel that they are letting their colleagues down or that they are not doing their job because they are reducing their hours to care for a close one. Training of line-managers includes sensitivity for these situations and to look for practical solutions that work for both the employee and the company. It is about the message 'Caring counts in the workplace'. To shape the line-managers' training employers need to do an old fashioned training needs analysis – what managers should know and do versus what they actually know and do.

Alternative to the training of line managers is a **single point of contact for working carers** in the company (might be HR office or trade union representative). The aim is to offer carers an approachable third party with whom they could discuss any challenges they were facing, and who could support them in discussion with line managers.

> **A returnship** is a professional internship designed specifically for people returning after an extended career break. It is a short-term position drawing on existing skills and experience, and may be supplemented with relevant training courses.
>
> **Access to information**: employers will need to encourage all employees to be aware of and understand the organisation's policies on supporting carers, diversity, equal opportunities. They should have access to a regular e-mail bulletin, carers' information pack, intranet pages to help navigate through complex system of support available from the state, carers' network.
>
> **Addressing stigma of caring**: the culture of being able to speak openly about what it is like to be a carer, rather than feel embarrassed or worried about what colleagues, managers will think. Creating such a culture in male-dominated companies, sections or departments would be a particularly challenging and important.

## STEP 6
### Engaging stakeholders – *Carers Networks*

The aim is to provide a single focal point for carers in the company, to build a strong mutual support network building on the collective knowledge and insights of employee carers; to provide links to external networks that have specialist knowledge about caring with people with particular conditions (for instance, such as dementia); to provide information links to services; to identify common issues facing employee carers where a company might be able to provide collective solutions. Carers network within the company has to be widely promoted through internal newsletters for employees, intranet (where carers can share ideas, advice and information, emotional support), news website. It can provide face-to-face workshops, one to one support, online webinars etc. It is welcome that visible and senior member of staff join to or sponsor the network, which rises its visibility and credibility.

## STEP 7
### Measuring and reporting

Some of the data that employers should consider measuring and reporting on would be: the number and percentage of those identifying as working carers, eligible/all employees on flexible working, taking up carer leave, participating in a carers' network, returning from care-related leave, trained line managers etc. If employers do not measure and report take-up of measures to help working carers, they do not know if they are for real or exist largely on paper (**implementation gap**). All analysis has to be disaggregated by sex, to measure not only the implementation gap but also to monitor **gender gaps**. Employers should provide evidence that they meet criteria in five areas:

> **A.** Identification of carers: there is good understanding of what the term 'carer' means and a system is in place to enable carers to identify themselves.
>
> **B.** Policy: carers are recognized within HR policies or procedures.
>
> **C.** Workplace support: carers can access practical workplace support or can access information about external support and services.
>
> **D.** Communication, awareness rising and training: policies and available support are communicated to all members of staff.
>
> **E.** Peer support: carers are supported to engage with other carers.

# SMEs

Smaller organisations may not have time or the need to develop formal policies but will rely on a general organisational culture and philosophy and use those to respond to particular circumstances and needs as they arise. Talk about organisational culture and try to be as flexible as possible with options of discretionary paid and unpaid leave. Be open and foster a culture whereby individuals can discuss their personal circumstances with their line manager. Understand that the members have responsibilities outside of their employment and if time off work is required for that try to accommodate it. Restrict meetings to the morning or early afternoon and keep them short. Be attentive to the employees with small children or dependant partners/parents and enable them more time with family, schedule working days around care, add in buffer time around deadlines so that stress levels and late-night working are limited. Do not make judgement on workers who need support. SMEs often depend totally on the quality of employees and of their relationships with clients where the biggest constraint is finding good and loyal workers. Losing a good employee can be very painful for SMEs, which makes a clear business case to be a flexible and supportive employer.

# 8 TAKE-AWAY: CHECKLIST FOR EMPLOYERS TO HELP THEM CARE FOR WORKING CARERS: 5PS

## PREPARATION

· Identify working carers

· Consult them on what would be most helpful and on how best to find hidden carers

· Look at what other employers are doing for their working carers

## POLICY

· Carer-proof existing policies such as flexible working and leave

· Adopt a specific Carer Policy, cross-referencing to other HR policies and practices (health and wellbeing, diversity, inclusion...)

· Introduce carer specific support measures

## PROMOTION

· Publicise support for carers through regular communication with employees

· Encourage leaders to 'come out' about their own caring roles

## PRACTICE

· Make reasonable adjustments such as allowing use of mobile phone for carers

· Provide advice and information for carers on the organisational intranet, link to external help such as carers' organisations, which also offer help to carers

· Train the line managers on caring for carers and how to raise the issue of sensitivity with their direct reports

## PEER SUPPORT

· Create/support an employee carers network

· Exchange learning and experience with other employers informally or through representative employer groups.

To be a supportive employer of working carers includes continuous improvement in and high rates of take-up by both male and female employees of carers' policies. The policies will include freelancers working for employers too, preparing their employees for future caring responsibilities and promoting returnships for ex-carers to re-join the organisation and participation in policy discussions about how better to help working carers. The ethical attitude behind this is that business can be a force for good, that it should have a societal purpose beyond just making a profit to create a more responsible, inclusive and sustainable economy.

# SOURCES

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# Men in care

WORKPLACE SUPPORT FOR CARING MASCULINITIES

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