

Care*di*zo

Equal Share of Care at Home

Insights from Cyprus, Bulgaria,
Greece, and Lithuania



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Abbreviations

BG – Bulgaria
CSO – Civil society organisation
CY – Cyprus
EIGE – European Institute for Gender Equality
EL – Greece
IT – Information technology
LT – Lithuania
MIGS – Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies
NBDN – National Business Development Network
NGO – Nongovernmental organisation
WIIC – Women's Issues Information Centre
WHEN – previously Women On Top

About the Project

TheCAREdiZO – CARE Driven Innovation for Gender mainstreaming in Home, Micro-Enterprises & Micro-CSOs project aims to close the gender care gap by promoting a gender-transformative approach in Home, Micro-enterprises, Micro-CSOs and utilizing innovative digital tools.

Through research, game based learning, and advocacy the project fosters a gender-transformative cultural approach that values care work, combats gender stereotypes, and encourages men and women to share unpaid care responsibilities more equally. This project will promote micro-enterprises and micro-CSOs, which constitute 93.5% of total EU businesses, to implement family-friendly and work-life balance policies. As part of its activities, CAREdiZO will develop a game, a gamified e-learning course, a series of podcasts, a digital platform engaging 120 participants from across Europe, and a certification system recognizing organizations that promote gender equal workplaces. CAREdiZO aims to engage the public by raising awareness about the value of unpaid care work and promoting positive role models who challenge traditional gender norms associated with caregiving.

The project is implemented by a consortium of five organizations from Greece, Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Lithuania, coordinated by CHALLEDU, and supported by WHEN Equity Empowerment Change, Women's Issues Information Center, Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies, and National Business Development Network – each bringing unique expertise in gender equality, women's empowerment, and community engagement.

Project partners

The following organizations are participating in the project:



Challedu (Coordinator) - Athens, Greece, challedu.com

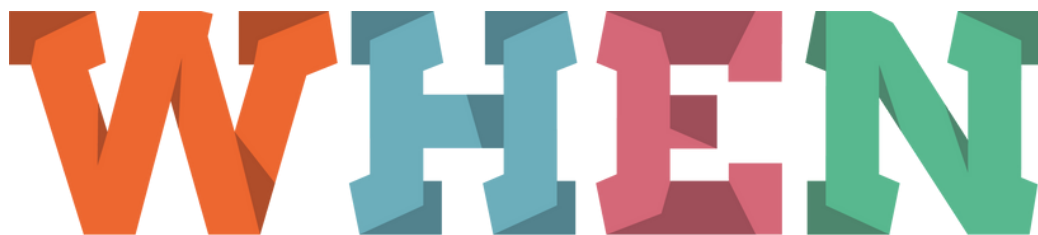
CHALLEDU's mission is to empower communities and learners by creating impactful innovative educational solutions that raise awareness, inspire action for positive change and create a sustainable, inclusive and equitable world for all. We envision a more sustainable, inclusive, equal and just world where everyone has the opportunity to learn, grow, and become active contributors to a better future in the community and worldwide.

Our key values are:

Creativity-Innovation-Sustainability: We embrace creativity, cutting-edge technologies, including game-based learning, in alignment with 17 Sustainable development goals (SDGs) to transform education and create long-term, positive, and impactful solutions that promote environmental protection, social justice, and human rights.

Collaboration- Inclusion: We are committed to fostering inclusion, equity and accessibility, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive.

Education - Empowerment : We believe in the transformative power of education to empower individuals and communities by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to take control of their futures, contribute to their communities, and drive positive change in society.



EQUITY • EMPOWERMENT • CHANGE

WHEN (former WoT)- Athens, Greece

<https://when.org.gr>

WHEN is an organization that aims to empower women professionally and promote gender equality in the workplace. It focuses on individual empowerment, through mentoring, training, community building, career and legal counselling, as well as on bringing about positive change in the social, work and economic environment in which we all grow, learn and work. To this end, it provides consulting and training to companies and organizations, conducts research to better understand the needs of women and the gaps in gender equality in Greece, formulates policy proposals and creates campaigns to raise awareness about the obstacles that women still face today in their equal participation in public life. In 2024, the organization created the WHEN Hub, the first hub for women's empowerment and gender equality in Greece, which, among other things, provides creative play services for children 0-12, while their parents use the space to get trained, work, network and build their financial independence.



Women's Issues Information Centre (WIIC) - Vilnius, Lithuania <https://lygus.lt/>

Women's Issues Information Center (WIIC) is a leading women's non-governmental organization in Lithuania, committed to promoting gender equality and providing support to individuals affected by gender-based violence. WIIC mission encompasses informing and educating society on gender equality issues, reducing gender-based violence, shaping gender policies, and implementing them in Lithuania.

WIIC offers various programs and services, including:

- **Training Programs:** We conduct training sessions on gender equality topics for companies, professionals, policymakers, youth and organizations, tailoring over 30 different programs to meet specific needs.
- **Specialized Complex Assistance Center:** Providing free, confidential, and specialized comprehensive assistance to individuals who have experienced domestic violence.
- **Women's Helpline:** Offering free, confidential, and anonymous emotional support via telephone and online platforms 24/7.

Through these initiatives, WIIC strives to create a society where gender equality is the norm, and all individuals can live free from violence and discrimination.



National Business Development Network (NBDN) - Sofia, Bulgaria

<https://nbdn-bg.org/>

The National Business Development Network (NBDN) is an association of 42 business centres and business incubators established under the JOBS project, with the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Bulgaria and the local municipalities.

NBDN's mission is to create a new entrepreneurial culture, to improve the standard of living through various forms of support for the development of small and medium businesses and ensuring greater employment opportunities in the rural and lagging behind areas of Bulgaria.

NBDN supports its members in the design and management of international projects in the areas of employment encouragement, increasing the competitiveness of the Small and medium-sized enterprises in the country, professional training and re-qualification in the fields of tourism, agriculture, protection of the environment, etc. NBDN offers high quality services that empower entrepreneurship and local economies, improve citizens' quality of life and preserves and promotes the local, regional and national cultural and natural heritage. The NBDN also has its Vocational Training Center (VTC), which was established in 2003 as a training entity to provide vocational training and is licensed by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training. The center provides training in 28 vocational sectors in 95 specialties and 179 professions including entrepreneurship, management, marketing, agriculture, tourism, ICT, soft skills, etc.



MEDITERRANEAN INSTITUTE OF GENDER STUDIES

Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS) - Nicosia, Cyprus

<https://medinstgenderstudies.org/>

The [Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies](https://medinstgenderstudies.org/) (MIGS) is a non-profit organization affiliated to the [University of Nicosia](#) that promotes and contributes to projects of social, political, and economic themes relating to gender with an emphasis on the Mediterranean region. The Institute recognizes the multi-layered levels of discrimination against women and accepts that this discrimination takes different forms. It is committed to the elimination of this discrimination using a combination of research and analysis from a feminist and gender equality perspective, advocacy and lobbying, as well as trainings, conferences, and other activities.

In the framework of promoting women's rights in Cyprus over two decades, MIGS has consistently implemented projects aimed at a) strengthening women's participation in political and public decision-making, b) bolstering and mobilising civil society to promote gender equality priorities, and c) promoting civic participation among diverse groups of women, such as women of migrant background. MIGS also carries out research studies and analyses commissioned by European and international bodies including the UNHCR, the Council of Europe, the European Parliament, and the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), among others. MIGS, as the only independent feminist NGO in Cyprus, remains at the forefront of women's rights activism in Cyprus, with a critical and strategic role in keeping gender equality issues on the political agenda, and is also an active member of numerous civil society networks and advisory bodies at the national and European level.

— Research Methodology —

Desk research aims to understand the needs and challenges of both men and women to equally share responsibilities of care. Project partners CHALLEDU (Greece), Mediterranean Institute of Gender Studies-MIGS (Cyprus), National Business Development Network-NBDN (Bulgaria), WHEN (Greece), Women's Issues Information Centre-WIIC (Lithuania) conducted desk research in their respective countries. The desk research guidelines provided partners with structured support in identifying relevant information. As a result, partners collected examples of good practices and diverse family role models that challenge gender stereotypes, including men and women.

This desk research has been conducted in accordance with the guidelines provided by the WIIC. The methodology followed a structured, multi-stepped process to ensure comprehensive, evidence-based, and contextually relevant data collection and analysis of national legislation and policies, with a particular focus on gender-disaggregated caregiving practices at the home. The primary objective was to map the existing landscape, identify exemplary models, and assess the challenges and policy frameworks surrounding share of care responsibilities between women and men.

- **Data Collection**

1.1 Survey Data

The initial phase involved a thorough scan and review of national, regional, and municipal surveys addressing the distribution of care work at home. Priority was given to statistically significant and methodologically sound sources, including household time use surveys, labor force surveys, and specialized public opinion polls. The search encompassed both general caregiving practices (childcare, eldercare, disability care) and attitudes toward gender roles within domestic settings.

Key sources included:

- **National Statistical Agencies** for household and gender time use data.
- **EIGE's Gender Statistics Database**, particularly its section on care-related indicators. This offered harmonized European-level data enabling cross-country comparison and contextualization.
- **The International Network on Leave Policies and Research**, providing qualitative and quantitative insights from recent country reports.
- **Eurobarometer, Eurofound and OECD datasets**, particularly public opinion on gender roles and labor division in caregiving.
- Academic publications and peer-reviewed studies supplementing empirical findings with sociological and psychological interpretations of care work dynamics.

CHAPTER 1 - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.2 Administrative Data

In parallel, a focused review of administrative data was undertaken to examine institutional records on caregiving and employment behaviours:

- **Parental Leave Utilization:** Statistics on the uptake of maternity, paternity, and parental leave by gender were sourced from government labor departments, national insurance boards, and demographic reports.
- **Employment Adjustments Due to Care Responsibilities:** National employment data capturing part-time work, career interruptions, and job exits due to caregiving duties was collated. Where available, trends were disaggregated by type of care (childcare, eldercare, long-term care).
- **Care-Related Benefits and Entitlements:** Data on benefit uptake rates by gender were analysed to understand the intersection of social protection and care responsibilities.

A comparative lens was applied where possible, enabling identification of structural patterns and disparities – e.g., a high percentage of men are legally entitled but do not access paternity leave, as seen in some EU countries. Quantitative findings were contextualized within their legal, cultural, and policy frameworks.

2. Review of Legislation and Policies

The legislative review involved mapping the legal infrastructure (as of January 1st, 2025) relevant to caregiving responsibilities within the home. National and sub-national laws were examined, focusing on:

- **Parental and Care Leave Entitlements** (e.g., duration, payment levels, transferability).
- **Recent Innovations** such as non-transferable paternal leave, “care credits” in pension systems, or time banking for family caregiving.
- **Legal reforms** promoting gender equality in the domestic sphere, particularly those embedded in national strategies or gender action plans.

Simultaneously, **policy instruments** were reviewed to assess supportive frameworks beyond legislation. This included financial incentives, tax deductions, and awareness campaigns aimed at balancing gender roles in caregiving. National Gender Equality Plans were a primary source for such initiatives.

3. Identification of Good Practices

A key component of the methodology was the identification and documentation of 3–5 good practices per country that actively promote a balanced distribution of care work at home. This entailed desk-based exploration of municipal and community-level initiatives, particularly those implemented by micro-enterprises, CSOs, and local governments. Selection criteria for practices included: innovation, scalability, gender inclusiveness, sustainability, and demonstrable impact. Data was gathered from grey literature, project reports, press releases, academic case studies, and direct communication (where feasible) with involved entities

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In addition, role model families and individuals who challenge traditional norms and stereotypes were identified. Public figures and everyday citizens alike were included to showcase relatable and inspirational narratives. These were examined for their social influence, media representation, and behavioural impact on society.

4. Analysis of Needs and Challenges

To complete the picture, the research synthesized findings on the needs and challenges faced by both women and men regarding caregiving roles at home. This component focused on:

- **Sociocultural barriers:** Norms and stigmas discouraging male involvement in caregiving.
- **Workplace structures:** Discriminatory practices or lack of flexibility impacting caregivers.
- **Emotional and mental health impacts,** particularly the burden carried by women due to unequal responsibilities.

The research incorporated survey data, policy papers, academic analysis, and publicly available examples of promising practices to articulate how challenges differ based on the type of care provided. The methodology provided a solid foundation for the comprehensive mapping of gendered caregiving practices, legal frameworks, and cultural shifts regarding the equal share of care at home.

— Introduction —

Despite the universal declaration of gender equality and progressive social changes, Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, and Lithuania, each face certain challenges in achieving gender equality, particularly in the realm of unpaid care work and work-life balance. In BG, EL, CY and LT the unequal distribution of unpaid care work at home remains one of the most persistent and deeply rooted barriers to gender equality. As disclosed by the Gender Equality Index (EIGE, 2024) women continue to be the primary caregivers in families, responsible for children, older adults, disabled and chronically ill individuals, and household tasks. This unequal burden impacts women's participation in the labor market, their financial independence, and their mental and physical health. Men, on the other hand, remain significantly less involved in daily caregiving, largely due to entrenched gender norms, workplace stigma, and the absence of strong policy incentives.

This analytical report provides a comprehensive overview of the current landscape of caregiving and gender roles in BG, EL, CY, and LT. Drawing on a diverse range of sources – including national and international statistical data, policy frameworks, academic literature, grassroots initiatives, and real-life narratives – this report offers a multifaceted examination of how caregiving responsibilities are distributed and perceived across these four countries.

The report focuses on identifying both the commonalities and divergences in national approaches to caregiving, with particular attention to how gender roles influence, shape, and are shaped by care practices. By comparing policy measures, societal norms, and lived experiences, the report highlights key themes and systemic challenges that impact the equal distribution of care work. The report maps these challenges while also identifying emerging opportunities for fostering a more balanced sharing of care responsibilities. Ultimately, the aim is to inform future policy development and social dialogue by providing an in-depth understanding of the structural and cultural factors at play. To support this goal, the report draws on comparative data that highlight persistent gender gaps across different national contexts.

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality Gender Equality Index (EIGE, 2024), all four countries are below the average EU Gender Equality Index score of 71 (Graph 1). Lithuania's score is closest (65.8) and Greece (59.3) is furthest from the EU average.

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1 _____ 100



1 _____ 100

European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2024

Equal share of care at home along with work–life balance has become a critical issue in modern societies. The unequal redistribution of unpaid care responsibilities, leading to persistent gender disparities in work and family life still prevail. Gender Equality Index's domain of time and its subdomain on care activities indicates that Lithuania (68.2) is significantly behind CY, EL and especially BG (76.5). However, all four countries are below EU average score of 78.7.

Graph 2. Time / Care activities scores (EIGE, 2024).

1 _____ 100



1 _____ 100

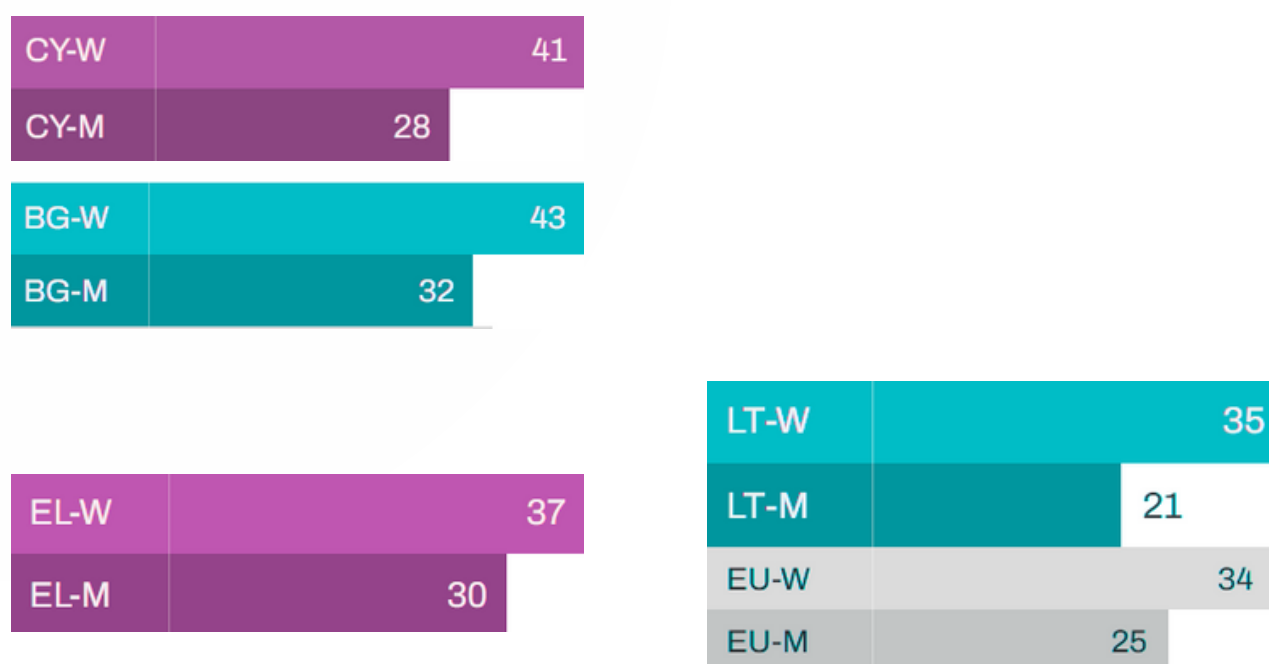
European Institute for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Index 2024

Despite ongoing social progress, women continue to shoulder a disproportionately large share of household responsibilities. This includes caring for children and elderly family members, as well as performing most of the unpaid domestic work (Graph 3). This indicates a heavy persistence of gender

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inequalities in care responsibilities, highlighting the need for targeted efforts to close the gender care gap and identify promising practices.

Graph 3. People caring for and educating their children or grandchildren, elderly or people with disabilities, every day (% , 18-74 population) (EIGE, 2022)



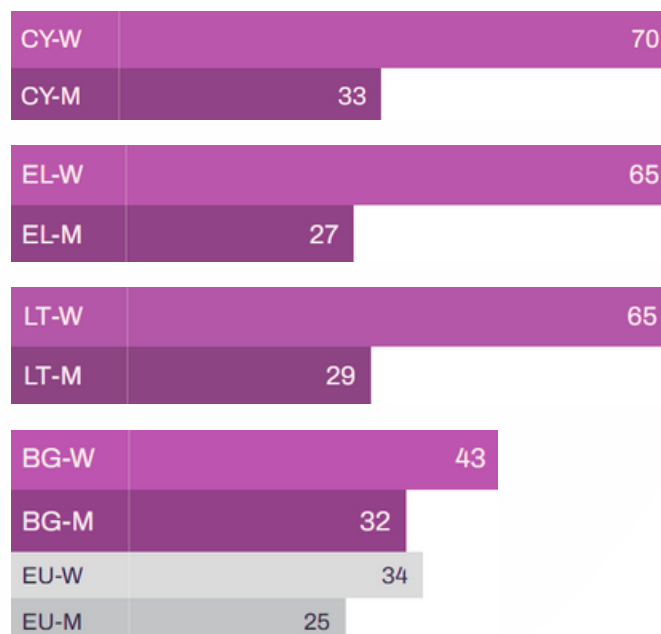
Source: EIGE' survey on unpaid care, 2022. EIGE's calculations

Women and men in all countries share family and home care very unequally. While the average EU difference between women and men devoting time daily to caring for their children, grandchildren, elderly or disabled family is 9%, in Lithuania and Cyprus this difference reaches 14% and 13%, while the difference in Greece is smaller than the EU average – 7%.

While the EU average shows a 9% difference between women and men engaging in daily cooking and housework, data from four countries reveal a significantly different picture – highlighting persistent inequalities in the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work. BG is closest to the EU average with a difference of 11 %, while the other three countries are far from equal share: LT – 36% difference between women and men, CY – 37% and EL – 38%. (Graph 4).

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Graph 4. People doing cooking and/or housework, every day (% , 18-74 population) (EIGE, 2022)



Source: EIGE' survey on unpaid care, 2022. EIGE's calculations

In all countries this imbalance is even more pronounced in households with young children. In EL: 37% of women with children under 12 perform care work daily, compared to only 30% of men. In LT 66% of women with children under 12 perform care work daily, compared and 36% of men (EIGE, 2024). In CY, 41% of women and 28% of men care for their children's education or grandchildren, elderly, or people with disabilities daily.

Data from reporting EU countries reveal persistent gender disparities in the division of unpaid domestic work, with women consistently bearing a greater share of their time for household work. Regarding unpaid domestic work, 70% of women and 33% of men in Cyprus report doing cooking and/or housework every day (EIGE, 2022). As a 2024 study by the Centre for Demographic Studies of Barcelona shows the average mother in Greece spends 4.7 hours a day cooking, cleaning, washing, walking the dog, and organizing the family members' schedules as a consistent home secretary. Correspondingly, the average father will spend 1/5 of the corresponding time, almost one hour (59 minutes to be exact) a day on housework. According to the Bulgarian National Institute, the largest share of activities related to housework is spent on food preparation – 54 minutes (women – 1 hour and 23 min. and men – 22 min.), followed by washing dishes – 23 min. on average and shopping and services – 20 min. However, the men spend more time than women in household activities such as construction and repair, gardening and keeping farm animals (Bulgarian Industrial Association, 2024).

Labor Force Participation and Gender Disparities

Recent data highlight persistent gender disparities in employment across EU countries, with women – especially those with young children – facing significant disadvantages in labor force participation and employment rates. In BG the rising gap in labor force participation in 2014–2020 translated into a rising employment gap, concerning a particular group – women with young children, who experience a wider gender gap. In 2022, the employment rate for women was 7 percent lower than for men. Some groups experienced more significant gaps. For example, in 2021, the employment rate of women aged 25–54 with one child younger than six was only 72,3%, compared to 93,2% among their male counterparts. The employment gap among those with three or more young children was even higher (Eurostat, 2022). In 2024 the highest gender employment gap was in Greece – 18,8% of total population, followed by Romania with 18,1%, significantly lower gender gap in Cyprus – 10% and lowest in Lithuania – 1,4% (Trading Economics, 2025).

The double burden of career and unpaid domestic labor can be particularly high for BG women, considering that when they work, a low share of them work part-time. In comparison, nearly half of the women in the EU work part-time (Robayo-Abril and Rude, 2024). Working part-time is closely linked to the gender care gap. Administrative data that – according to ELSTAT (2024), 63% of part-time workers in Greece are women, and they are four times more likely than men to reduce their working hours due to care obligations. The Labour Institute of GSEE (2023) notes that women continue to make up the majority of those who take career breaks, work part-time involuntarily, or drop out of the labor force altogether for care-related reasons.

According to the International Network on Leave Policies and Research (2024), Greek law lacks a non-transferable, well-compensated "daddy quota" to incentivise take-up by fathers. Flexible working arrangements are legally allowed, but uptake is rare due to lack of awareness, workplace resistance, and enforcement gaps. For example, one father interviewed in the context of the SHARE project (share.isotita.gr) that aimed to provide a gender equality label to companies of all sizes incorporating gender mainstreaming and work-life balance policies, summarized his experience: "Taking paternity leave made me more than a spectator – it made me a co-star in our family life. But I had to fight for it at work, and even friends made fun of me."

In Lithuania 21% of employed women and 12,5% of employed men work part-time (SDA, 2024). In Cyprus, according to data from the Statistical Service of Cyprus, in 2024, a total of 43,486 individuals were employed in part-time positions. Of these, 38.4% were men and 61.6% were women. Therefore, highlighting the significant overrepresentation of women in part-time employment, a trend that reflects persistent gender inequalities in the labour market.

Access to Early Child Education Care

Access to early childhood education and care remains uneven across the EU, with significant variations in participation rates among member states, reflecting broader socio-economic and policy differences. The highest participation rate of children in early education aged 3 and over within the EU is currently above 96% in seven EU member states, Lithuania being one of them. In Cyprus, the participation rate of children aged 3 and over in early childhood education and care was 91.5%, slightly below the EU 2030 target of 96%. (Eurydice, 2025). The lowest participation rates are in Greece (68.8 %), Romania (74.8 %).

While in Greece early childhood care is subsidized, coverage remains patchy, and childcare provision is insufficient to enable gender-equal participation in paid work. According to national and EU statistics:

- Only 29% of children under 3 years old are enrolled in formal childcare, compared to the EU average of 35%.
- Public childcare centers often close by 2:00 PM, limiting their usefulness for working parents.
- In rural and island regions, services are even more limited, reinforcing gendered family models where women remain primary caregivers.

These structural deficits, combined with traditional norms and insufficient support for men who wish to take on a more active role, result in a persistent and self-reinforcing gender care gap in Greece.

Early child education in Lithuania is compulsory from the age of 6. If a child enters pre-primary education at the age of five, pre-primary education may last for two years, after an assessment of the child's developmental and educational needs and progress, as determined by the Minister of Education, Science and Sport. The guarantee of a place in pre-school was introduced for all 2-year-olds in 2025. Not all municipalities can ensure availability, hence “nanny” allowance was introduced. Most parents with children (regardless of gender) do not feel that there is a lack of childcare provided by the state or municipality (Purvaneckiene G. et al., 2024).

Education in Bulgaria is compulsory for children between the ages of 4 and 16. Parents who do not enrol their children in the education system are subject to fines and are not entitled to family benefits for children. Nurseries are organisationally separate structures in which medical and other professionals provide education and training for children from three months to three years of age. Nursery groups may also be established in kindergartens for the care of children from 10 months to three years of age. The kindergarten is the institution in the pre-school and school education system where children from the age of three are brought up, educated, socialised and trained until they enter Grade I (6-7 years old) by acquiring a set of competences – knowledge, skills and attitudes – necessary for the child's successful transition to school education and by providing support for personal development.

A compulsory two-year preschool preparation (from the age of 4) is organised in preparatory groups in kindergartens or in preparatory groups at school and there is no tuition fee. However, in Bulgaria, there is no guarantee of a place in early childhood education and care services for children under 3 years of age. In 2019, only 21,6% of children under three were attending formal childcare services; most children under three were looked after only by their parents – usually their mothers, and this is a prerequisite for a gender gap. (Eurochild-Early Childhood Development in Bulgaria – Country profile).

Gender Norms in Caregiving Roles

The fact that women typically spend disproportionately more time on unpaid care work can be strongly related to gendered social norms that view unpaid care work as a solely female responsibility:

- More than one-fourth of the population in Bulgaria in 2022 (strongly) agreed with the statement that a preschool child suffers when a mother works (World Value Survey 2022). Both men and women were equally convinced of the truth of this statement.
- Similarly, most Bulgarians believe it is a woman's duty toward society to have children (World Value Survey, 2022).

Data on EL also demonstrates the persistence of traditional views on gender roles in Greece:

- 76% of Greek respondents agreed with the statement: "A preschool child suffers if the mother works."

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- 62,2% of Greek and 56,4% of Cypriots agreed that "Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay." (Dianeosis, 2018).
- 59% agreed that "When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women."

The findings from the Special Eurobarometer 545 (2024) reveal a persistent adherence to traditional gender norms in all four countries - BG, EL, CY, and LT - despite broader European policy efforts aimed at promoting gender equality (Graph 5). Across these Member States, the belief that caregiving is primarily a woman's responsibility and financial provision a man's role remains prevalent, though the degree of adherence varies by country and gender.

Bulgaria

BG exhibits the highest levels of adherence to traditional gender roles among the four countries:

- 74% believe caregiving is a woman's primary role (79% of men, 69% of women).
- 74% also agree that men should be the financial providers (77% of men, 72% of women).

The high alignment between male and female respondents indicates broad societal consensus on traditional roles, with minimal gender divergence in opinions. This suggests that in BG, caregiving norms are deeply rooted and largely internalized across genders, reinforcing structural and cultural barriers to equal care sharing.

Greece

In EL, 53% (58% of men and 50% of women) of respondents believe that a woman's most important role is to care for her home and family – significantly above the EU average (38%). Additionally, 54% (57% of men and 51% of women) agree that a man's primary role is to earn money.

These findings underscore the slow pace of cultural transformation in EL regarding gender roles, suggesting deeply entrenched gender stereotypes. The consistency in male and female perspectives regarding men's role as breadwinners points to a normalized societal expectation around masculinity tied to financial responsibility.

Cyprus

CY presents slightly lower, yet still notable, levels of traditional views:

- 51% of respondents (53% of men, 40% of women) view caregiving as a woman's key role.

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- 53% endorse the man-as-breadwinner model, aligning closely with EL.

What stands out in CY is the larger gender gap in responses: only 40% of women support the caregiving stereotype compared to 53% of men. This gap suggests a growing awareness or resistance among women to traditional gender expectations and roles. Additionally, the shared 54% male agreement rate in CY and EL on male breadwinning highlights regional similarities in male role perceptions, despite differing levels of female agreement – 45% of women in Cyprus compared to 52% of women in Greece.

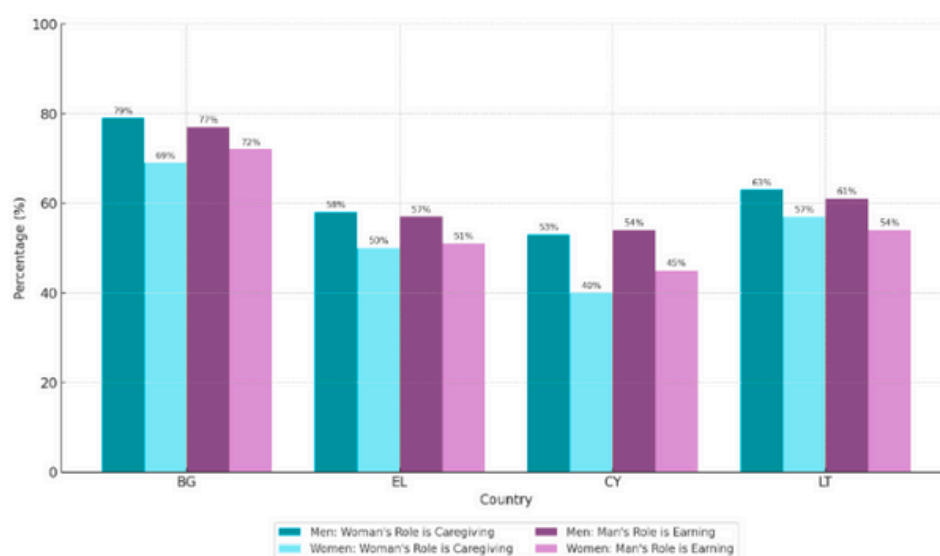
Lithuania

LT presents a similarly traditional gender outlook:

- 60% of respondents (63% of men, 57% of women) affirm the caregiving role as central for women.
- 57% (61% of men, 54% of women) view earning money as the main role for men.

These figures reflect a gendered perception split, where men are more likely than women to endorse traditional roles. Notably, 57% of respondents agree that 'men are naturally less competent' at household tasks, signalling a traditional biological determinism mindset that may justify unequal household labor divisions. Interestingly, 51% of LT respondents support the idea that "if a father earns less than a mother, he should be the one to stay home with the children" indicating a moderate openness to role reversals under specific economic conditions. This nuanced finding suggests that economic pragmatism may challenge traditional norms, though cultural perceptions still dominate.

Graph 5. Gender role perceptions (% by gender)



Source: Eurobarometer 545, 2024.

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Across BG, EL, CY, and LT, deeply embedded gender norms continue to shape attitudes toward caregiving and breadwinning. Although varying in degree and gender divergence, all countries display structural and cultural resistance to equal care-sharing responsibilities. While there are glimpses of attitudinal shifts, particularly among women and in specific economic scenarios, the prevailing beliefs continue to place a disproportionate caregiving burden on women, reinforcing the gender care gap.

In Lithuania, women continue to bear a significant burden in household responsibilities, including caring for children and elderly family members. This results in women performing most of the unpaid work at home, which affects their ability to balance work and family responsibilities, ultimately impacting their careers and personal development. Gender inequalities in unpaid care work remain a significant challenge in Lithuania. According to the national survey (Purvaneckiene G. et al., 2024), almost half (47.6%) of Lithuanian adults have experienced difficulties in balancing work and family responsibilities. However, only 14.3% face these difficulties often or very often. One fourth of the population (24.7%) have experienced problems at work due to reconciling family and responsibilities. More women (29.9%) than men (18.3%) experience such problems. Men are more satisfied than women with the sharing of childcare between parents. Survey data clearly indicate that although Lithuanian women actively participate in the labor market, they still carry most care responsibilities, and despite some private companies introducing measures to promote work-life balance, traditional caregiving roles remain predominantly assigned to women.

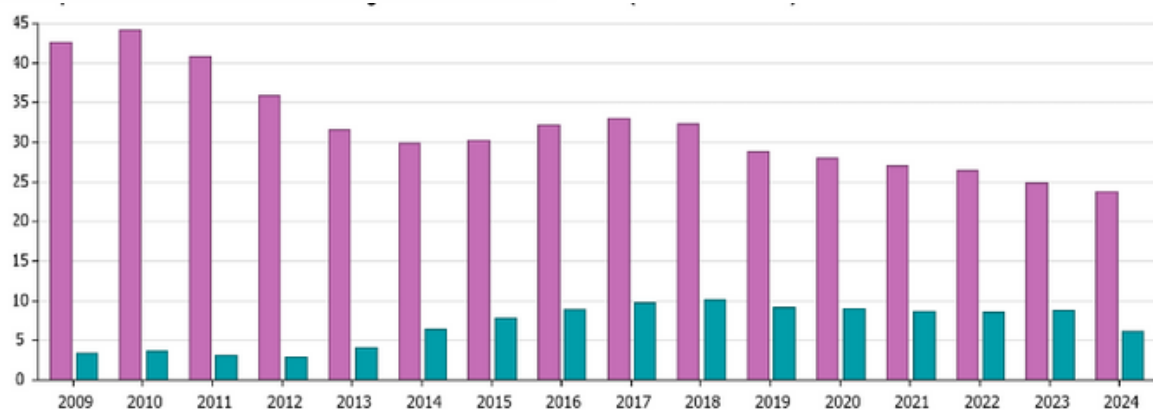
Comparatively, while Lithuania and Greece emphasize the challenges women face in balancing work and family responsibilities, Bulgaria highlights improvements in gender equality metrics, and Cyprus underscores the persistence of gender inequalities in care responsibilities. All four countries are making strides towards gender equality, but they each face distinct challenges in achieving a balanced distribution of unpaid care work and ensuring supportive work environments for both men and women. The report looks further into challenges in each country.

BG demonstrates the strongest reinforcement of traditional gender roles, with nearly three-quarters of both men and women adhering to stereotypical views. EL and LT share comparable patterns, though LT offers slightly more progressive views in specific contexts (e.g., care responsibilities shifting based on income). CY reveals a more pronounced gender divide, suggesting a potential generational or sociocultural shift, particularly among women. In all countries, men are more likely than women to support traditional gender roles, reflecting asymmetric perceptions that could hinder progress in gender-equal care sharing. The notion of male incompetence in household tasks (noted in LT) and the conditional support for paternal caregiving roles reflect underlying cultural narratives that both justify and restrict men's involvement in care work.

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Across all four countries, women bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work compared to men. This is a common theme that highlights the persistence of traditional gender roles and societal expectations.

According to data collected by the Lithuanian National Social Insurance Fund (Graph 6) men comprise one fourth of those taking parental leave.



Graph 6. Parental leave by sex in Lithuania (thousands)

 Women  Men

Source: Lithuanian National Social Insurance Fund

According to OECD Family Database for 2023 (OECD, 2024) the paid paternity leave and paid parental and home care leave (effectively) earmarked for fathers in Bulgaria is 2.1 weeks and is below the EU average of 3.2 weeks. This is one of the reasons why Percentage of fathers in Bulgaria taking parental leave is among the lowest in the EU (11% for 2016).

In Greece, there is no database in which the uptake of paternity or parental leave by fathers is systematically gathered (Eurofound, 2019). According to the WHEN research from 2023, about 50% of men with children under 12 years old in Greece have never taken paternity or other parental leave. In Cyprus, 3,754 applications for paternity leave were approved in 2023, compared to 6,383 for maternity leave, suggesting a persistent gender gap in leave uptake despite available leave policies (Angeli & Venetiadi, 2024).

CHAPTER 4 - NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

Legislation

In recent years, work–life balance has emerged as a key priority in labor policies across Europe. While EU Member States have adopted varying approaches, the overarching goal remains the creation of a more inclusive and supportive working environment. The main difference between countries is the extent to which the work is divided between women and men, and the amount of public (municipal) support that facilitates care work.

The European Pillar of Social Rights sets out 20 key principles (EC, 2017), where equal opportunities, gender equality, childcare and support to children, and work-life balance principles are among them. To make the European Pillar of Social Rights a reality the Action Plan sets out concrete initiatives and includes headline targets for the EU by 2030. To support the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Directive on work-life balance for parents, i.e. the Directive 2019/1158 entered into force July 2019, and all four countries transposed its requirements into national legislation implementing different legislative measures to address the gender care gap. The Directive introduced several fundamental provisions, including a minimum of four months of parental leave per parent, ten days of paid paternity leave, five days of carer's leave, and measures to facilitate flexible working arrangements.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria's maternity leave is notably generous, offering mothers one of the lengthiest periods of full pay leave compared to other countries in the EU. Bulgaria provides a notably extended period of paid maternity leave, totalling 58.6 weeks or 410 days. This duration is considerably longer than the average in the EU (21.1 weeks). Additionally, the average payment rate during paid maternity leave is 90 percent of the national average earnings. Maternity leave and payments can be transferred from the mother to the father or one of the grandparents (provided they are still working) once the child reaches six months of age. In such instances, the benefit will be equivalent to 90 percent of the social insurance income of the father or grandparent for the subsequent six months. The option for grandparents to access this benefit was introduced starting January 1st, 2023. Following the initial period of maternity leave with pay, mothers are eligible for a further 51.9 weeks of less-generous parental leave, paid at an average rate of about 44.5 percent of prior earnings. This parental leave, theoretically available to mothers, is also more generous in Bulgaria than most countries and significantly above the EU average (43.5 weeks).

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Paternity leave was significantly shorter than maternity leave; however, a recent reform made it more generous. In 2022, paternity leave, which can only be taken by fathers, was only 2.1 weeks in Bulgaria. While the length of paternity leave was generally low in Bulgaria, it was the EU average. The Bulgarian government recently changed its Labor Code, expanding paternity leave entitlements and establishing the right to flexible work arrangements for parents of young children and caregivers. These adjustments have aligned Bulgaria with the European Union Directive No. 2019/1158, which focuses on promoting work-life balance for parents and caregivers. The changes became effective on August 1st, 2022. With the updated legislation, fathers now have the right to an extra two months of paid paternity leave, which can be utilized until the child turns eight. This leave can be taken as a continuous block or in multiple shorter periods, contingent upon submitting a 10-day written request to the employer. In addition, the current parental policy framework does not grant fathers any father specific parental leave. The current design of compulsory parental leave policy in Bulgaria does not encourage more redistribution of child-rearing responsibilities from women to men. While fathers can decide to take non-earmarked parental leave, international evidence shows they do not often do so. However, Bulgaria's government approved the 2021–2030 National Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality, which integrates a gender perspective across all policies and levels while implementing specific actions.

Greece

In Greece, the key provisions of national law include:

- 17 weeks of fully paid **maternity leave**.
- Non-transferable **parental leave** for each parent: four months each, but only two months paid at the minimum wage level, and which must be taken before the child turns eight. However, this leave is often underutilized, particularly by fathers, due to low compensation and workplace resistance.
- 14 days of paid **paternity leave** upon birth.
- **Carer's leave**: 5 unpaid days per year and does not reflect the full extent of care responsibilities often undertaken by workers with dependents. There are no additional incentives, such as bonuses or non-transferable days, to encourage equal sharing between parents.
- The right to request flexible working arrangements for parents and carers with at least six months of service.

However, enforcement is weak, and employer resistance remains high. Requests for flexible arrangements are often denied without justification. According to the Greek Ombudsman's 2023 special report on gender and employment, the authority recorded a rising number of complaints from parents, especially mothers, who were either denied flexible work arrangements or experienced retaliation after requesting care-related leave. One noted case involved a mother demoted after requesting reduced hours to care for a dependent child.

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Another involved a father discouraged by his employer from using parental leave, reinforcing the idea that caregiving is not a male duty.

The Ombudsman also emphasized that the right to request flexible arrangements remains largely theoretical in Greece due to lack of enforcement mechanisms and employers' non-compliance.

Cyprus

In Cyprus the main related law is the Leave (Paternity, Parental, Carer, Force Majeure) and Flexible Work Arrangements for Work-Life Balance Law of 2022. This legislation consolidates existing rights and introduces new measures to help citizens balance professional and family responsibilities.

The Republic of Cyprus has introduced several laws to support work-life balance, such as regulation of remote working, childcare, care for older people, and long-term care. [The Leave and Flexible Work Arrangements for Work-Life Balance Law \(216\(I\)/2022\)](#), incorporates Directive (EU) 2019/1158 into Cyprus national law. This legislation consolidates existing rights and introduces new measures to help citizens balance professional and family responsibilities, promoting gender equality in the workplace. Key provisions of the legislation are:

- **Parental Leave:** Each parent of a child under eight years of age (older in cases of adoption and disability) is entitled a total of 18 weeks parent
- **Maternity leave:** In 2024 the maternity leave was extended from 18 consecutive weeks to 22 consecutive weeks.
- **Paternity Leave:** Fathers are entitled to two weeks of paid paternity leave at the birth or adoption of a child. If the mother dies during maternity leave or giving birth, the father's benefit for paternity leave includes the remaining weeks of the mother's unused maternity leave.
- **Carer's Leave:** Employees who provide regular care or support to a close relative (parent, child, spouse, or civil partner) or resident with medical need are entitled to a maximum of five working days of unpaid leave a year on the production of a supporting certificate of medical need.
- **Force Majeure Leave:** Employees are entitled to up to seven days of unpaid leave yearly for emergency family-related situations, such as illness or accident calling for their immediate presences. This leave, in contrast to previous acts, is no longer restricted to dependents of the family.
- **Flexible Working Arrangements:** Employees who have at least six months of continuous service can apply for flexible work arrangements, such as work from home, flexible working hours, or part-time working. This right is extended to parents of children under the age of eight and carers. Such requests must be approved by employers. In the event of refusal, the employers must reply in writing within one month, stating reasons for rejection or delay. Employees have the right to resume their original pattern of work upon the expiry of the agreed period.

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Lithuania

In Lithuania parents of children born after January 1st, 2023, are entitled to two months of non-transferable parental leave each, with the parental allowance available until the child is 18 or 24 months old. Maternity leave is 18 weeks, and paternity leave is 30 calendar days. Each parent, including adoptive or foster parents, has two non-transferable months, while the remaining amount of parental leave and allowance can be shared between parents and grandparents.

Maternity leave. In 2023 100% of women who gave birth took maternity leave. Its duration is 18 weeks on 78% of their net earnings, based on the individual's earnings in the last 12 months. Women taking maternity leave receive pension credits to maintain their pension rights. Maternity leave is paid only to those employed or self-employed mothers who were working at least 12 months during the last 24 months. In the case of multiple or premature births or complicated deliveries, additional two paid weeks are provided.

The same payment is provided for **Paternity leave**. Paternity leave is a targeted leave granted to the father of a baby and is not transferable to others. Paternity leave can be taken at any time between the birth of the child and the child's one year of age. The duration of paternity leave is 30 calendar days. It can be taken either continuously or in two parts.

Parental leave. Not only the child's mother or father (stepparent, adoptive parent, or guardian) but also the child's grandmother or grandfather can take a parental leave and receive benefits. Self-employed persons (e.g. those working on the basis of a certificate of individual activity; author's contracts; individual agricultural activity, etc.) or, in exceptional cases, those who do not work but are insured by maternity social insurance (e.g. spouse of a civil servant working in a diplomatic institution of the Republic of Lithuania abroad, etc.) may receive parental benefits, although they are not entitled to parental leave. Although the number of men taking parental leave seems to be increasing in Lithuania, most of them leave in the second year of parental leave but continue to work and the child is still looked after by the mother. For example, according to National Social Insurance Fund data for 2020, 40% of the recipients of parental leave in the second year of child are men, and almost all of them (90% or 7,500) are working and the child is being cared for by the mother during that time. In 2023 mothers accounted for 73.8% of all users of Parental leave while fathers accounted for 26.4%.

Parental leave allowance is paid from the end of maternity leave until the child reaches 18 or 24 months of age. Parental leave can last for up to three years, but no allowance is paid in the third year. If parents choose the 18-month option, then the amount of the parental allowance is 60% of the amount of the compensatory earnings. If the 24-month option is chosen: the parental allowance is 45% of

CHAPTER 4 - NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

compensable earnings until the child reaches 12 months and 30% of compensable earnings from 12 months until the child reaches 24 months. Adoptive parents or foster caregivers have the same rights to Parental leave and benefit as biological parents.

Carers' leave. The employer must grant unpaid leave to an employee who is caring for a sick family member or a person living with the employee, or to an employee who has submitted a report on his/her state of health from a healthcare provider, for as long as recommended by the healthcare provider. If an employee is caring for a disabled person, he/she is entitled to the unpaid leave up to 30 calendar days per year.

Flexible working measures:

- According to the Law on Safety and Health at Work, in addition to the general breaks to rest and eat at least every 3 hours, breastfeeding employees can be given a half-hour break for breastfeeding. At the mother's request, the breaks for breastfeeding may be joined together and used to shorten the working day. Breaks for breastfeeding are covered by the worker's average wage.
- The Labour Code describes different flexible working time arrangements that can be requested by an employee, though there is no obligation for an employer to agree, with some exceptions. Some examples: flexible working schedule, individual working regime, overtime, and summary working time.

Though for employees having child the provisions are more generous:

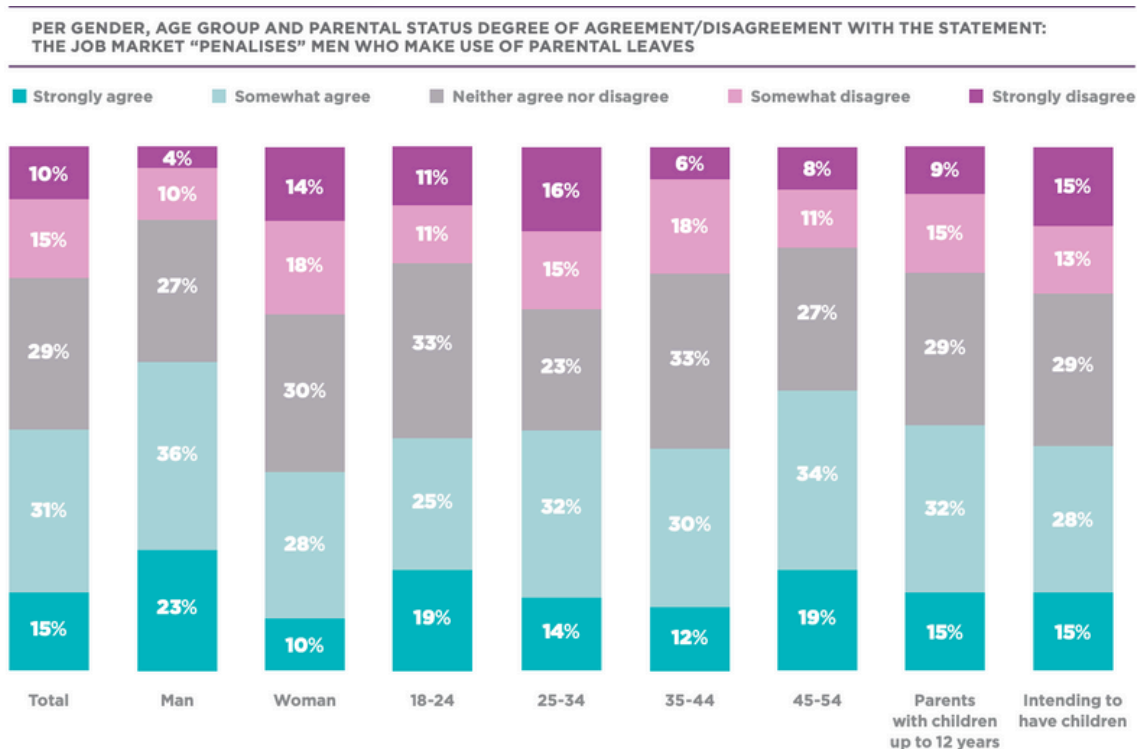
- An employee with a child under 14 years of age can take 2 weeks of unpaid leave per year. Mothers and fathers raising one child under the age of 12 are entitled to additional leave days once every three months, and those raising two children under the age of 12, are entitled to additional leave days once a month. Those raising 3 or more children are entitled to an additional two leave days per month.
- Parents raising children under 3 years of age have the right to a reduced working time of 32 hours per week. This is relevant for employees of budgetary institutions, e.g., employees of state and municipal institutions and enterprises, public institutions whose owner is the state or municipality, and the Bank of Lithuania. For part of the working time they are not working, the fixed salary is retained.

Bulgaria leads four countries in terms of generous, comprehensive maternity and parental leave entitlements, offering the most extensive support for maternal and parental care among the countries studied. The inclusion of grandparents as eligible caregivers and the recent paternity leave extension show a progressive, inclusive, and family-oriented policy design. Lithuania demonstrates strong flexibility and inclusivity, particularly with non-transferable parental leave for both parents, robust financial support options, and recognition of diverse caregivers (e.g., grandparents, self-employed).

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The tiered payment models allow customization, fostering both economic adaptability and parental choice. Cyprus has made meaningful legislative progress, especially through its 2022 consolidation law. However, the limited duration of paid parental leave and employers' discretion in postponing requests may hinder uptake. Still, structured legal safeguards, such as written justification requirements for refusals, help uphold parental rights. Greece must improve the situation in terms of policy enforcement, gender equality in caregiving, and cultural acceptance of male involvement in child-rearing. While formal provisions exist on paper, lack of enforcement mechanisms, employer resistance, and social norms undermine their practical impact. This reflects a gap between legislative intention and implementation. A major contribution to the understanding of care dynamics in Greece comes from WHEN 2023 study on the uptake of parental leave by fathers. The study found that although the Greek legal framework offers 14 days of paid paternity leave and up to 4 months of parental leave per parent, only 1 in 10 fathers take advantage of paternity and parental leave. The main barriers include fear of negative judgment from employers and co-workers; Lack of information or clarity around their entitlements; widespread perception that such leaves are “not for men.”

Graph 7. Per gender, age group and parental status degree of agreement/disagreement with the statement: “The job market penalises men who make use of parental leaves”.

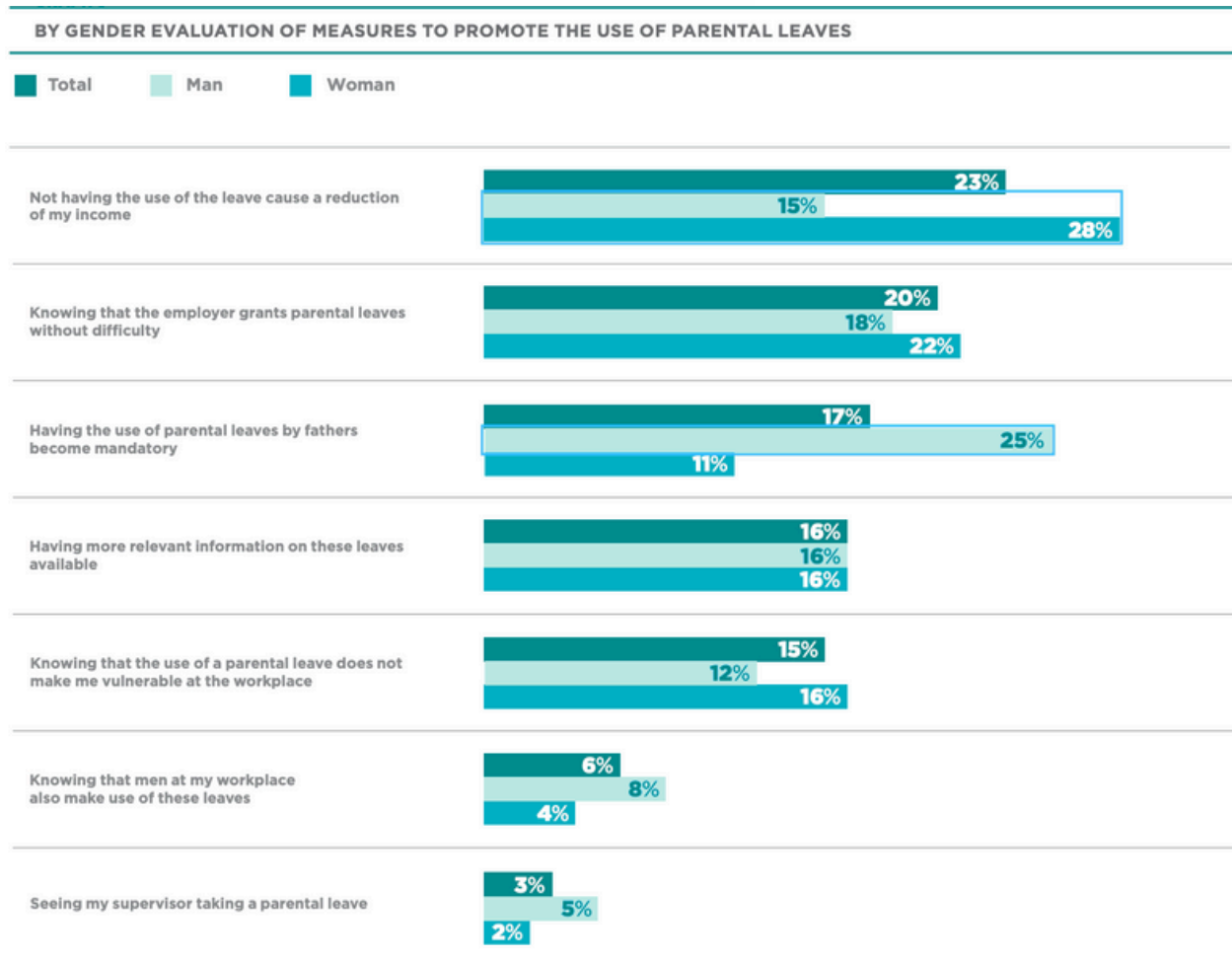


Source: WHEN (2023) Paternity & Parental Leaves – Aspects of the gender gap in (unpaid) care.

CHAPTER 4 - NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

This social stigma intersects with structural gaps: according to the WHEN study, 56% of fathers who did not take leave said they would have done so if it had been longer, better paid, or more protected by law.

Graph 8. By gender evaluation of measures to promote the use of parental leaves



Source: WHEN (2023) Paternity & Parental Leaves – Aspects of the gender gap in (unpaid) care.

Across all countries, non-transferable paternity leave and targeted policies for male caregiving uptake remain underdeveloped. Except for Lithuania, which mandates non-transferable leave, most countries still do not incentivize men to share caregiving duties, perpetuating gender disparities in unpaid domestic labor.

CHAPTER 4 - NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

Policies

Bulgaria

Bulgaria's government approved the 2021–2030 National Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality, replacing the previous strategy covering 2016–2020. This document serves as the central policy framework for gender equality and mainstreaming. The strategy adopts a dual approach, integrating a gender perspective across all policies and levels while also implementing specific actions to address the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. Annual national plans are developed to operationalize the strategy that outlines concrete actions, responsible entities, and performance indicators. These plans encompass contributions from institutions, social partners, and nongovernmental organizations involved in implementing state policies on gender equality. The strategy prioritizes achieving gender equality in the labor market, reducing the pay gap, combating violence, and protecting and supporting victims. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy is responsible for executing state policies on gender equality and overseeing the strategy and national plans. The effectiveness of these plans is evaluated annually through the publication of the Report on Equality between Women and Men in Bulgaria (EIGE).

Bulgaria has implemented important legislation targeting gender equality, but there is a need for systematic assessments. In 2016, Bulgaria introduced the Law on Equality between Women and Men (UN Women, 2017). The law enhanced the alignment of national legislation with EU standards and international legal instruments related to gender equality. The state policy on gender equality and non-discrimination is a cross-cutting initiative by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. At the central level, the National Council on Equality between Women and Men, established in 2004 as a consultative body to the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria and chaired by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, supervises this policy. This council fosters sustained collaboration on gender equality among government institutions, social partners, and civil society. To operationalize the state policy, a gender equality coordinator position was established in each government institution in 2016. This move aimed to ensure the practical implementation of the policy at the operational level. These coordinators, reporting to the Secretariat of the National Council on Equality between Women and Men, play a key role in fostering gender equality within their respective institutions.

According to UN Women, Bulgaria currently has in place 91.7% of the legal frameworks that promote, enforce, and monitor gender equality under the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator. At the same time, data are only available for 45.9% of the indicators needed to monitor the SDGs from a gender perspective, and many available indicators lack comparability, leading to important gender data gaps (UN Women, 2022).

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Greece

The National Gender Equality Action Plan 2021–2025 includes actions on work-life balance, but implementation has been limited. The Plan includes commitments to:

- Expand public childcare infrastructure and adjust operating hours to meet working parents' needs.
- Strengthen eldercare services and introduce local care points across municipalities.
- Promote equal sharing of care through awareness campaigns and professional training.

However, a recent audit by the Greek Ombudsman (2023) found that only 2 out of 12 planned actions on care infrastructure had been initiated.

Likewise, the 2024 National Strategy for Long-Term Care foresees the development of community-based services, including the professionalization of care workers and support for informal carers, however its rollout is still at an early stage.

Cyprus

The National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2024 – 2026) under the "Gender and Social Policy" chapter aims at gender mainstreaming into the welfare state policies. Its provisions include Action 3.1, a study on expanding childcare subsidies and extending the operating hours of childcare centres during the summer months, including August. The objective is to help parents balance professional and personal responsibilities by improving access to childcare services, potentially with the support of local governments. The findings of this study have not yet been published. Additionally, Action 3.2 aims at upgrading existing care facilities for older people and/or building new ones. The objective is to enhance equal participation of women and men in the labour market by providing low-cost and high-quality care services for dependents while also promoting independent living support for people with disabilities. The results of the Action Plan have not been evaluated yet and we therefore have no indicators of success.

Lithuania

National action plan on equal opportunities for women and men 2023-2025 aim to enhance guarantees for work-life balance (Objective no. 2) and includes measures to raise awareness of the possibility of non-transferable parental leave. Objective 8 aims to create the right conditions for people to reconcile family and career by organizing a conference to share good practice in combining motherhood and fatherhood with professional careers. The conference is planned for 2025.

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Several new policy developments have been in force since 2025 in the country. From 2025, parents who work and employ a nanny to look after their children are eligible to receive a childcare allowance - or, in simple terms, a nanny allowance. This allowance is to help parents (as well as adoptive and foster parents) who want to combine a career and childcare but do not get a place in a nursery school, or, for example, if the family decides not to send the child to a nursery school for other reasons (e.g. if the child is very sensitive, often ill, has other special needs).

Since 2023 rooms for hourly childcare are set up in larger public (governmental and municipal) institutions following minimum requirements developed by the Ministry of Social Security and Labour, this requirement applies to all institutions with more than 100 employees. However, the set-up rooms do not offer actual childcare – they are set up as playrooms and study rooms. Institutions note that parents are still responsible for childcare and in most cases work areas are arranged nearby.



Photo credits: Saulius Žiūra, Vilnius.lt. Children playroom in Vilnius municipality. The playroom can host up to 15 children and the work area is suitable for 12 employees.

Some private companies follow this good practice example as well. For example, a telecommunications company “Telia” has a childcare room where employees can leave their children. “Telia” provides not only the room, as opposed to the municipality, but childcare as well. They partner with various educators and offer a range of activities. The service is free for their employees.

Other private companies, such as “Bitė”, “DanskeBank”, “Vinted” and “Ergo” also have childcare rooms. Mostly children up to 12 years old are allowed in the rooms; there are some limitations to the group size. Companies share that usually children are brought in during the school holidays or after the school day. However, it is important to note that such services are available mostly in Vilnius and are rare, if at all available, in rural areas.

CHAPTER 4 - NATIONAL LEGISLATION AND POLICIES



Photo credits: Delfi.lt, photos provided by 'Bitè' and 'Ergo' companies

The national gender equality and work-life balance policies across Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, and Lithuania reveal a shared commitment and there is an evident shift toward gender-responsive policy design. However, the degree of implementation, enforcement, and innovation varies significantly across the countries, reflecting different stages of policy maturity and institutional capacity.

Bulgaria stands out for its comprehensive policy architecture and institutional mechanisms for gender equality. The 2021–2030 National Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality and its annual action plans establish a strong framework with measurable objectives, institutional coordination, and multi-stakeholder involvement. Nonetheless, the lack of systematic assessments and persisting gender data gaps constrain effective monitoring and policy refinement. The inclusion of gender equality coordinators in each government institution is a notable strength, enhancing cross-sectoral policy integration.

In contrast, Greece's National Gender Equality Action Plan (2021–2025) is ambitious in scope but suffers from limited implementation. The slow rollout of key care infrastructure reforms and the weak enforcement of employer obligations undermine the plan's potential to foster real change. The gap between policy intent and administrative follow-through, as evidenced by the Greek Ombudsman's audits, highlights the critical need for accountability mechanisms and sustained political will.

Cyprus demonstrates a policy focus on expanding care infrastructure and enhancing service quality through its 2024–2026 Gender Equality Action Plan.

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However, the absence of published evaluations and performance data weakens transparency and makes it difficult to assess impact. Promising initiatives – such as the proposed expansion of childcare services and eldercare facilities – are yet to move beyond the planning stage, pointing to the importance of timely execution and public communication.

Lithuania illustrates a dynamic approach to work-life balance, integrating innovative measures such as childcare (nanny) allowances and the establishment of playrooms in large public institutions. Lithuania also demonstrates some good examples of private enterprises, however such initiatives are rare, limited and depended on employers. These policies support parental employment and demonstrate a responsiveness to practical caregiving challenges. Importantly, Lithuania's policies are evolving to reflect broader social inclusion, with recent developments such as granting paternity leave to a same-sex partner setting a precedent in a restrictive legal context. However, these advancements must be supported by clearer regulatory frameworks and further investment in quality childcare services.

CHAPTER 5 - GOOD PRACTICES

As traditional expectations surrounding masculinity and femininity evolve with a backlash of women's rights, a growing number of individuals and institutions are actively challenging entrenched norms. This chapter highlights good practices in BG, EL, CY and LT that promote diverse family role models promoting equal share of care responsibilities, presenting a range of initiatives that confront stereotypes and encourage more inclusive approaches to caregiving and family life.

Across the four countries, men and women are increasingly stepping outside conventional roles – men embracing active fatherhood and domestic care, women assuming leadership positions – thereby offering tangible alternatives to traditional gender roles. These role models are essential for reshaping societal perceptions, especially among younger generations, and for fostering a culture of gender equality in both public and private spheres.

— Successful Models for Equal Care Work —

Bulgaria

Since 2017, the Bulgarian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy has started an initiative for Awarding a Badge of Distinction for Significant Achievements in the Effective Implementation of the Gender Equality Policy. Some of the awarded companies are:

- VMware Bulgaria Ltd: both in 2022 and 2023 VMware Bulgaria Ltd. was awarded with the Badge of Distinction for Significant Achievements in the Field of Equality between Women and Men. Central to VMware's organisational culture are the principles of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). DEI policies and initiatives are developed by a global team whose strategic partner in defining goals and their implementation is the company's senior management. The goals are integrated into the company's business strategy and their progress is monitored in real time. All employees in the company are committed to achieving them, but a very key partner in this process are the so-called Power of Difference Communities – a global network of employee communities who strongly believe in the DEI principles and recognise them as their personal priority. They work at the local level to implement policies and change attitudes.



Photo credit: <https://ekfwomen.org/>

CHAPTER 5 - GOOD PRACTICES

- **Mondelēz Bulgaria:** The company renewed its commitment to working toward gender equality, diversity and inclusion employing three key priorities: more women leaders; an inclusive workplace free of bias and creating an active and diverse community. Already in 2019, the company implemented programmes and practices to embrace the three goals set out in the Mondelēz philosophy expressing this notion of equality. The company has always promoted equality between women and men in decision-making processes, and has made efforts through internal procedures, committees and regulations to combat gender-based violence, as well as to protect and support anyone in a disadvantaged position.
- **Experian Bulgaria PLC:** In 2022 Experian Bulgaria PLC was also awarded with the Badge of Distinction for Significant Achievements in the Field of Equality between Women and Men. The company abides by its internal equality principles during the whole recruitment process of selection and hiring of employees. Each job seeker, regardless of their gender, race, religion and social status, has equal rights for career development in the company. The company's equality recruitment policy forms a part of each recruitment notice. Besides, the candidates receive a digital file "The job seeker book", which describes in detail how the company encourages diversity and equal opportunities. Another mandatory component in the Experian recruitment process is to conduct interviews for each vacancy with both men and women.

A



As part of their onboarding programme, each employee gets acquainted with the Experian Global Code of Conduct, which contains the core principles of the company for building a culture of inclusion, mutual respect and equal opportunities for development. In addition, during their first day at work, each employee is acquainted with the Rules of Internal Procedures, which underline the culture of inclusion and equality.

Photo credit: <https://ekfwomen.org/>

- **The Bulgarian Centre for Women in Technology (BCWT)** inspires, motivates and supports girls and women in Bulgaria to find their place in the digital world. It works to support women's leadership and increase women's professional participation in the digital industry, science and entrepreneurship. BCWT initiates networking and cooperates with IT businesses, business incubators and NGOs in the implementation of regional innovative projects. It also organises thematic training sessions and events, and stimulates research collaboration, exchange of good practices and resource mobilisation in the ICT sector. The idea behind the initiative is to contribute to a much-needed change of mindset and improve national environment to encourage women choose ICT and develop a career in the sector. When BCWT's initiatives started, it was obvious that women in ICT in Bulgaria lacked self-esteem and often had internal psychological barriers. Women often lack motivation to self-promote and draw attention to their own achievements, and they are reluctant to compete for professional recognition. These barriers often mean that girls who have studied IT and mathematics do not search for jobs in the sector and lose opportunities for career development, and that women already employed in IT do not develop professionally at the same pace as men.

CHAPTER 5 - GOOD PRACTICES

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CHAPTER 5 - GOOD PRACTICES

Greece

Several private companies in Greece have adopted promising internal practices to support a more equal distribution of care responsibilities. These include:

- MSD Greece: One of the first companies in Greece to proactively promote parental leave uptake among fathers. It offers flexible work arrangements, return-to-work support, and awareness campaigns encouraging male employees to take paternity leave.
- Vodafone Greece: Provides enhanced parental leave policies that go beyond national requirements, including longer paid leave for both parents and hybrid work models for new parents. The company also monitors gender-sensitive HR indicators related to work-life balance.
- EY Greece: Offers flexible and remote working options, especially for caregivers. It has developed mentoring programs and training aimed at normalizing shared caregiving roles.
- WHEN Hub: The WHEN Hub provides a co-working space with integrated on-site childcare in Athens. It supports working parents, particularly freelancers, by removing the spatial divide between work and care. Users report higher productivity and improved work-life balance. Since opening in 2024, it has served over 50 families.



Credit: hub.when.org.gr

- Genderhood: This NGO promotes gender equality and shared care from a young age. Their 'Playing for equality' educational program trains teachers and engages children aged 5–12 through experiential workshops. It has reached hundreds of students across Greece and was praised for cultivating new care norms early in life.

CHAPTER 5 - GOOD PRACTICES

Παίζοντας για την ισότητα

Μοιράζουμε τις δουλειές του σπιτιού ισότιμα σε αγόρια & κορίτσια



Τίτλος:	Σπιτικό εν Δράσει
Ηλικίες:	4-8 ετών
Διάρκεια	60-90'
Μεθοδολογία:	Βιωματικό εργαστήριο

Credits: genderhood.org

- Gender Alliance Initiative: Among its aims is to normalize caregiving among men and to challenge toxic masculinity norms. They also offer peer-to-peer learning and storytelling to engage men.
- Municipalities: Different municipalities (e.g. Trikala, Karditsa, Lamia), especially in central Greece, have tried to implement an integrated care model that includes extended childcare hours, eldercare day centres, and mobile care units.

Cyprus

According to the Teleworking and Well-being in Cyprus survey (2024) there are promising workplace practices in Cyprus. Several HR professionals reported implementing practices to improve the effectiveness of remote working and work-life balance, such as:

- Outcome-based performance evaluation instead of tracking working hours.
- Hybrid work, combining office and remote work.
- HR-led guidance and communication on best remote work practices.
- Regular team check-ins and transparent policies to enhance trust and accountability.

These initiatives signify a growing trend toward flexible, inclusive, and results-oriented work environments. However, such efforts should work hand in hand with stronger policy frameworks and cultural changes to promote equal share and responsibility for caregiving.

CHAPTER 5 - GOOD PRACTICES

CareDivide Project. The Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) participates in the CareDivide project, co-funded by the EU. The project aims at encouraging work-life balance and gender-sensitive workplace practices by:

- Integrating flexible working policies into business management
- Supporting local authorities in fostering micro-SME environments that support caregiving services
- Facilitating collaboration among companies, policymakers, and social institutions in the establishment of supportive business cultures

The project CareDivide is still in its early stages, so the deliverables are not available, and its impact is yet to be measured.



Source: Facebook page of the project
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61573878792472>

Lithuania

Work and family are two of the main values in the lives of Lithuanians, but many still face the problem of balancing their professional life and family responsibilities. Women's Issues Information Centre implemented the project "FORWARD! Reconciliation of family and work" (EQUAL programme) in 2005- 2008. While the project was rather innovative at that time, for example- promotion of childcare rooms in the office, and promotion of childcare services in rural areas – the ideas are still relevant nowadays.

Data collection is crucial for informed policy decision making. One of the good examples is publicly available data provided by the Lithuanian Railways, one of the biggest companies in the country. The company employs more than 9,000 staff (<https://ltglink.lt/en>) and provides the percentage of employees who have taken parental leave being eligible to do so. It clearly indicates that vast majority of men do not take parental leave, while all women did so:

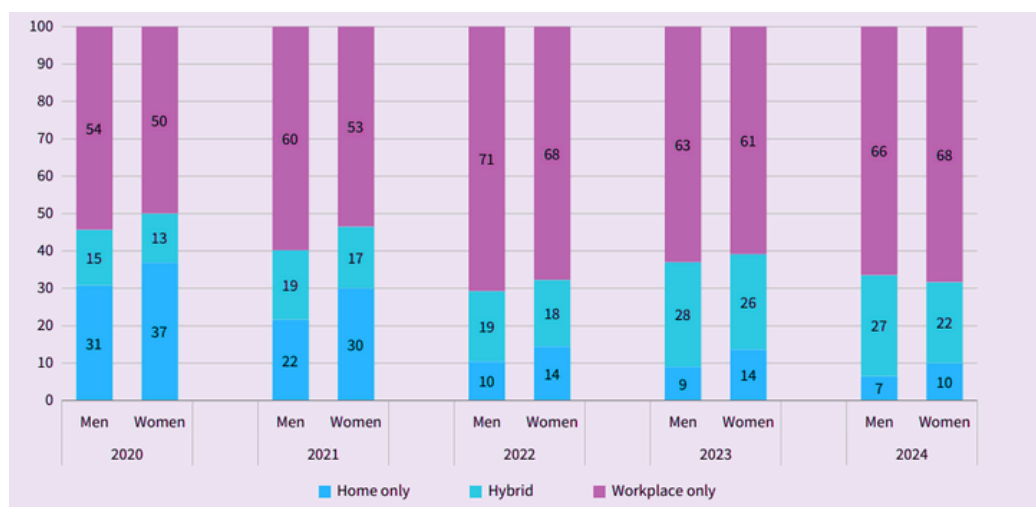
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2021		2022		2023	
Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
12%	100%	11%	100%	7%	100%

In Lithuania, there is a trend for companies to invest more in employee well-being programmes, which include physical and mental health care and employee support programmes. Although employees still face difficulties in balancing work and personal life due to long working hours and demands, more and more organisations are trying to use flexible working hours and remote work to improve work-life balance. For example, the correlation between communication with employees on parental leave and a positive image of the employer was revealed in a recent survey conducted by Mikalajūnienė, Darulytė and Narbutaitė. A survey of 800 employees working in Lithuania who were currently or recently on parental leave found that employees who had regular contact with their employer were much more likely to recommend jobs created by that employer. In these cases, they acted as representatives of the employer (Mikalajūnienė et al., 2022), which can be directly linked to a positive impact on the employer's image.

However, gender inequality effects are especially visible in the time of crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on work-life balance. The ability to work from home proved to be a difficult struggle for those having care responsibilities at home. As data from graph 9 indicates, the post COVID-19 pandemic years showed a decreased opportunities for remote work (Eurofound, 2025).

Graph 9. Place of work by gender, 2020–2024, EU (%) (Eurofound, 2025)



CHAPTER 5 - GOOD PRACTICES

Family Role Models Challenging Stereotypes

Bulgaria

One of the role models is the family of Vanija and Eugenia Jafferovic. The former football player Vanja Jafferovic has become an exemplary 'housewife'. As Vanja's wife brings the main income at home in return he takes care of housework. Vanja himself revealed that he must run the washing machine, get the dishes out of the dishwasher, and do the shopping (LadyZone.Bg, 2023).



Photo credit: LadyZone.Bg, 2023

Another model presents Antoinette Pepe and Ivo Karamansky Jr. The Bulgarian influencer Antoinette Pepe, who often talks about how difficult it is to achieve a balance between motherhood and work commitments, shared her opinion on the topic of fatherhood. The mother of four children makes a whole list of tasks that a father figure performs in the life of a child. As the influencer shares footage on social media from her daily life as a mother very often in the same videos and photos, the father of Antoinette's youngest child – her daughter Beatrice – is also seen. The man next to Pepe, Ivo Karamansky Jr., often helps the mother to care for all the children, and even she herself has shared that Ivo is a favorite of the kids. The influencer is adamant on the topic of parenting and the fact that it is of the utmost importance that both the mother and father take care of the children.

The role of fathers covers many aspects of a child's life, and Antoinette makes a whole list to explain the importance of encouraging fathers to be involved in the day-to-day care of children. Antoinette Pepe starts with the emotions and security that a father figure gives to the baby.

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Father care provides emotional stability that helps the baby feel protected and loved. It continues with the cognitive development that results from a variety of play. She also lists language development, physical growth, social skills the child acquires by interacting with people other than the mother and ends with one of the most significant things about the mother – namely the help and relinquishment of her role. "When the father is actively involved in the baby's care, it relieves the mother and creates balance in the family," Antoinette Pepe concluded (LadyZone.Bg, 2024).



Photo credit: LadyZone.Bg, 2024

Greece

Despite the slow pace of cultural change, a growing number of families in Greece are actively reshaping traditional gender dynamics at home. These role models, though still in the minority, represent a quiet but significant shift in caregiving norms.

A relatively recent Kathimerini feature (2022) highlights everyday Greek parents who have chosen to defy conventional roles: mothers who prioritize their careers and fathers who take on the bulk of caregiving responsibilities:

- Eleni & Giorgos: Eleni is a self-employed professional whose work requires long hours and travel. Her partner, Giorgos, became the primary caregiver for their three young children, managing school runs, household chores, and emotional labor. "I wanted our children to grow up seeing both parents fully present, even if that meant switching roles," he explains.
- Maria & Nikos: When Maria secured a demanding executive position, Nikos, a former engineer, chose to work part-time and eventually paused his career to care for their two children. "At first, friends made jokes," he admits, "but now they ask for advice. Things are changing – slowly, but surely."

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Credits: kathimerini.gr

- Single-mother-led households: The article also showcases single mothers who have built strong support networks to sustain their dual role as breadwinners and caregivers. Through co-housing, shared childcare duties, and digital platforms, they challenge the idea that caregiving must be a solo, gendered responsibility.

Cyprus Breaking the Mould Campaign



Within the framework of the European-funded project "Breaking the Mould," Cypriot couples have made their lives as lived in the dual-earner, dual-career model public. Constantia and Demetris, for instance, shared their story publicly to help bridge the gender care gap. The following is the respective poster with the slogan "Together in Everything." The couple has also featured in several interviews and discussions attempting to advocate for the equal sharing of care responsibilities. The Program was implemented by the Ministry of Justice and Public Order, the Commissioner for Equality, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Mediterranean Institute for Gender Studies and IMH.

Source: Project Breaking the Mould FB page
<https://www.facebook.com/breakingthemouldcy>

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Swedish Dads & Cypriot Dads exhibition



The "Swedish Dads and Cypriot Dads" photo exhibition was a joint initiative by the Embassy of Sweden in Cyprus and the Swedish Institute, supported by the Costas & Rita Severis Foundation. The campaign included a photograph competition, challenging Cypriot fathers to submit photographs showing how involved they are as parents. Shortlisted entries were exhibited at the main exhibition hosted at the Centre of Visual Arts and Research (CVAR) in Nicosia (March 7–22, 2019) and celebrated at an awards ceremony recognizing the global relevance of active fatherhood. The exhibition was complemented with educational programs for preschool and primary school children that introduced early discussions on gender equality and shared parenting responsibilities.

Source: CVAR Severis Foundation / Photographer: Johan Bävman

Lithuania



“Daugiau Balanso” (“More balance”) is a Lithuanian website (<https://daugiaubalanso.lt/en/>) dedicated to promoting work-life balance among employees, employers, and families. Administered by the Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson, the platform offers resources and guidance to help individuals and organizations harmonize professional and personal responsibilities. The website was developed as part of the project “Everyone is talking about it: Balancing work and personal life is becoming a reality”. Key sections of the website include:

- For Employees: Provides strategies and measures to effectively balance professional responsibilities with personal life.
- For Employers: Insights on creating a supportive workplace environment that facilitates work-life integration.
- For Families: Addresses pertinent issues related to balancing family responsibilities with work commitments.

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- Modern Dads: Features stories and experiences from fathers, emphasizing the importance of paternal involvement in family life.

By offering these resources, “Daugiau Balanso” aims to foster a culture where individuals can effectively manage their professional duties alongside personal and family commitments. Additionally, the website provides “A Work-life Balance Formula” explaining why it is important to balance work and family life.




Arūnas, Kaspas and Oskaras
“Kaspas’ and Oskaras’ arrival into this world was very much anticipated, I was preparing for it. But now I can say that you can’t really prepare for it. It’s the most amazing thing that has happened

happiness, fear, longing, joy, responsibility, annoyance, love, pride, etc. Before the birth of a child, I have never felt anything like this. Retrospectively, the past seems quite empty”



Justinas, Dorotėja and Justinas



Ažuolas, Joris and Markas
“My most important task now is to raise my beloved and loving sons. Brave, curious, just. I have experienced bullying, so I understand what it means to be rejected or abused. I try to raise my children not only with thick skin for the opinions of others or the “treat others as you want to be treated” mentality”

Credits: <https://daugiaubalanso.lt>

Inspiring father (caregiver) role model is provided by **Simonas Urbonas**, who is a Lithuanian writer, blogger, communications specialist, and father of three, known for his active engagement in family life and public discourse on parenting and societal norms. He has gained recognition for his candid discussions and personal experiments aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles and challenging conventional expectations. Urbonas has been vocal about the societal pressures faced by parents, particularly addressing the criticism his wife, politicians, former member of the Lithuanian Parliament, encountered for balancing motherhood with personal pursuits. He highlighted the judgment she faced for leaving their children in his care, questioning traditional gender roles in parenting. Emphasizing the importance of open communication within families, Urbonas pointed out that many Lithuanian parents avoid discussing topics like sexual education and finances with their children. He advocates for breaking these taboos to better prepare the younger generation for the future.

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As a public figure, Urbonas has shared his experiences and insights through various media outlets, including contributions to online portal Delfi. Currently he has the programme “Tėvai paprastai” (“Simply parents”) on YouTube and TV3.lt portal. His writings and interviews often focus on parenting, societal expectations, and personal development, resonating with a broad audience interested in contemporary family dynamics and self-improvement. Through his multifaceted endeavours, Simonas Urbonas continues to challenge societal norms, promote open dialogue, and inspire individuals to pursue personal growth and healthier lifestyles.

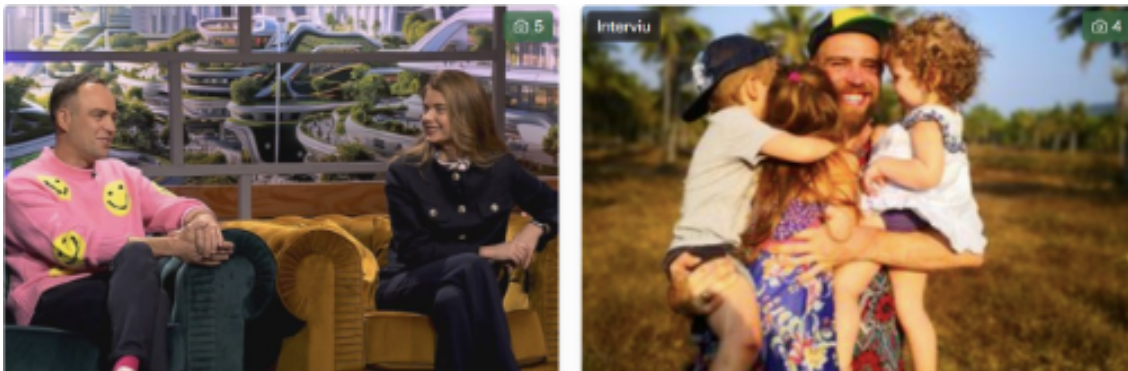


Photo credit: S.Urbonas personal album, shared in Delfi.lt

Another example – less outspoken but inspiring nevertheless – is media personality, radio host, and podcaster **Rolandas Mackevičius**. Mackevičius has two children and has been very open about wanting children and being an involved father. He has a large following on Instagram – over 300,000 followers – whom he inspires to devote time to their children, put them first, and always be available for them. Mackevičius serves as a role model in a more casual way: his children take up a lot of his time, and he shares that time with his audience daily.



Photo credit: R. Mackevičius personal album, shared in lrt.lt

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Lithuania's former Speaker of the Parliament and current Vice-Speaker of the Parliament **Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen** is a great example of women leadership. She excels in several male-dominated fields: politics and chess. Čmilytė-Nielsen is also a mother of four boys. She has mentioned multiple times that her husband is very involved. However, he does not receive constant praise or media spotlight. Additionally, Čmilytė-Nielsen is outspoken about balancing career and family – she shares her experience, examples, and encourages women. The Nielsen family – where the mother is a highly accomplished leader and the father is the primary caregiver – is a powerful example. Without putting the father in the spotlight, it demonstrates how normal such a family model can be.



Photo credit: V. Čmilytė-Nielsen with sons, personal album, shared in Kaunodiena.lt

These stories highlight the lived experience of gender-equal caregiving in practice – far from elite policy circles, and often in defiance of workplace expectations or social stereotypes. They offer valuable insights into how families, when supported by flexible work, mutual respect, and community solidarity, can break away from entrenched norms and build more equitable lives. These examples underscore the importance of visibility. When alternative models are seen and celebrated, they can inspire broader cultural transformation – and provide tangible blueprints for the kind of change CAREdiZO seeks to accelerate.

Equal share of unpaid care work – like childcare, eldercare, and domestic responsibilities – is essential for gender equality, child well-being, and work-life balance. Research shows that involved fatherhood enhances emotional, cognitive, and social outcomes in children (Cabrera et al., 2018) and promotes women's workforce participation (ILO, 2018). Persistent norms linking masculinity to breadwinning, workplace stigma, and lack of support structures hinder men's participation in care. Tackling these requires public policies, cultural change, and role models that redefine modern fatherhood.

By spotlighting good practices and role models, we can build a future where care is shared, valued, and celebrated by all. Inspiring examples of the fathers who are equally involved in daily caregiving tasks: feeding, bathing, bedtime routines, healthcare, and household planning should be shared across the borders.

CHAPTER 6 - CHALLENGES AND NEEDS IN EQUAL SHARE OF CARE

Across Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, and Lithuania, despite legislative progress and growing public awareness, care work remains deeply gendered – largely invisible, undervalued, and overwhelmingly shouldered by women. Whether it's childcare, eldercare, or the support of family members with disabilities, the burden often falls within the private sphere, without sufficient structural support or societal recognition.

At the intersection of ageing populations, gender inequality, and weak long-term care infrastructure, these countries face a policy crossroad. The gap between growing care needs and limited formal support systems leads not only to individual burnout but also to broader societal costs – including lower female labor market participation, reduced fertility rates, and increased poverty risk in old age. Without urgent investment in care systems and a cultural shift towards shared caregiving responsibilities, the sustainability of both social protection systems and economic productivity remains at risk.

The experiences of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, and Lithuania reveal a shared reality: while the demand for care continues to rise, the systems in place to support it remain outdated, under-resourced, and heavily reliant on unpaid and informal labor – most often provided by women. These patterns are no longer sustainable in the context of ageing societies, changing family structures, and increased female labor market participation.

The challenges are multifaceted. Inadequate formal care infrastructure, persistent gender pay gap, and the lack of targeted support for informal carers are compounded by cultural norms that continue to define caregiving as a female responsibility. Policies that do exist – such as sick leave, financial compensation, and personal assistance schemes – are either insufficient in duration or scope, or fail to extend protections to the self-employed, freelancers, or those with non-standard employment contracts.

CHAPTER 6 - CHALLENGES AND NEEDS IN EQUAL SHARE OF CARE

Unequal Care Divide in Ageing Society

The ageing population presents a significant socio-economic challenge across the EU. The challenge of ageing societies is well presented by the situation in Bulgaria, that is experiencing negative population growth since the early 1990s mostly due to high emigration. As from 1989 to 2024 the population dropped from nearly 9.0 million to 6.45 million (Eurostat) i.e. by more than 25%, it also became considerably older. In the period 2020-2060, the share of people aged 80+ in the Bulgarian population is expected to almost double. The average life expectancy of Bulgarians is slightly rising but remains the lowest in the EU. This leads to growing demand of care for older people. Traditionally, this type of care has been the responsibility of family members and is provided within the family (i.e. women). The provision of informal care may largely limit the scope for the professional activity and job retention of the carers of elderly family members and is likely to have repercussions for the social security system and labor market and increase the risk of social exclusion. It was only after Bulgaria had restructured its social services system in 2003 that the share of formal services provided in the community or at home increased.

There are various mechanisms of support for informal carers. Among these are leaves of absence from work (both paid and unpaid) and cash benefits (financial compensation). However, there is no remuneration system for the informal services provided by family members (as described in the ESPN Thematic Report Bogdanov et al. 2016). The law provides an opportunity for individuals to take leave of absence from work to care for a sick family member in compliance with Article 162 of the Labour Code.

According to Article 26 of the Child Protection Act (CPA), a sick leave certificate allows for the care of an ill family member at home and for the care of a child placed with relatives or a foster family (Regulation for criteria and standards of social services for children, 2003) It is not included under reference list. The relatives also have certain rights in this respect, but only if they are ascending and descending lineal relatives of the sick person and their spouse. The rights refer to taking leave from work and to financial compensation. The right to have a personal assistant applies to the groups listed below (Bogdanov et al. 2016):

- People with at least 90% permanent disability.
- Children with at least 50% reduced capacity for social adaptation.
- People or children taken from specialized institutions for people with disabilities.

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It is also important to note that opportunities for a temporary leave from work in accordance with sick leave schemes are only available for short periods of time. This means that support is provided for only a limited time with family members having to organize new arrangements for relatives needing Long-term Assistance (LTC) afterwards. Sick leave certificates are only accessible for jobholders in employment, not for the self-employed or people with freelance contracts.

Taking unpaid sick leave to care for children, elderly or sick family members is more widespread among women than men. This is one of the factors which negatively influences women's careers and the size of their pensions. Some difficulties can be associated with both home-based care and care outside the family. Bulgaria's specific support for home-based care is very limited, covering only a very low proportion of related expenses, while failing to include lost income due to provision of care. On the other hand, care outside the family also faces serious challenges due to shortages of qualified nursing staff. It is needed to provide an evidence base for the continuation of reforms, as the lack of in-depth studies and analyses on the employment effects for carers, and of the overall effects of the existing LTC regime on the well-being of informal carers and the cared for, needs to be addressed better.

An impact of traditional gender roles on share of care is reflected by the situation analysis in Greece. Despite recent legislative progress, care continues to be viewed as a primarily female responsibility in Greece. Men who attempt to engage more fully in caregiving often encounter social stigma or lack of workplace support. Employers frequently question their commitment to work or deny flexibility requests. At the same time, women face professional penalties for asking for care accommodations.

Economic factors further reinforce traditional care divisions. Greece's gender pay gap stands at 11.8%. Because men often earn more, families tend to default to women taking on care roles. This pattern perpetuates inequality and affects women's long-term financial security. Burnout is common. A 2023 study on the levels of stress and anxiety amongst parents of children and teens has shown that more than 77% of parents experience medium to high stress loads.

Cyprus data confirm that structural gender biases in the labour market and wider society reinforce expectations that women should, more than men, prioritize caregiving over career advancement. This assumption is reflected in the employment data: whilst the full-time employment rate of women in Cyprus is 52% (higher than the EU average that is 44%) their male counterparts clock in at 65%. Additionally, expected work life of a woman in Cyprus is 35 years versus 42 years for men, a gap which has a direct impact on pensions and long-term financial stability. Although there is a growing participation of women in the labor market of Cyprus, this change has not been matched by an increase in men caring for the family. The burden of caregiving continuously falls upon women, significantly impacting their careers, economic stability, and mental health.

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These inequalities are further exacerbated by gender segregation in employment. Women in Cyprus are predominantly placed in education, health, and social work (19% of employed women compared to 6% of men) – occupations that historically have been undervalued in terms of payment and career advancement. Mainly through gender stereotypes, women are steered into professions seen as an extension of their caregiving role at home, such as teaching or nursing (Angeli, 2019). In contrast, men are concentrated in better-paid domains, which contributes to gender pay gap (9% in Cyprus) and financial inequality (Eurostat, 2024). As long as gender segregation and the gender pay gap continue, it will be difficult to close gender gap. Inadequate social welfare policies in child and older people care leave no option to families but to ask one family member to reduce working hours. Because women tend to earn less and frequently encounter barriers in their career advancement, they often find themselves taking on caregiving roles. This in turn, continues the cycle of inequality.

The emotional toll is also of major concern. Studies, such as Donato et al. (2023), show that women experience higher levels of emotional exhaustion than men mostly because they juggle more work responsibilities with unpaid care work.

Furthermore, access to flexible work arrangements, a crucial factor for balancing work and care responsibilities remain unequal. 43% of women compared to 48% of men in Cyprus can take one hour or two off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters. Although it is better than the EU average (women 29%; men 37%), (EIGE, 2024) it still portrays the need for more flexibility in workplaces.

Situation in Lithuania is very similar to BG, EL and CY, where the challenges are very similar and more effective reforms are needed. Many employers face the problem of qualified personnel. They are willing to introduce measures supporting work-life balance and improving workers' well-being by creating more inclusive and flexible working environments. The introduction of extended parental leave and the right to flexible working arrangements all go in the direction of supporting a more equal distribution of care responsibilities between women and men, as well as a better balance between work and personal lives. However, these reforms focus mainly on childcare duties, overlooking other caregiving responsibilities, like care of the elderly and long-term care.

Traditional gender roles still prevail in society, encouraging women to take on a greater share of domestic and care work. It is crucial to change society's attitudes regarding women's and men's roles in caregiving to the elderly, the sick, persons with disabilities, children, and doing housework.

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An unequal distribution of care duties negatively impacts not only women's professional careers and economic independence but also men's well-being and involvement in family life. When both partners actively participate in caregiving, families experience improved relationship quality, better child development outcomes, and enhanced overall well-being, but these findings are not recognized by part of the society. Cultural norms and workplace expectations often discourage men from taking parental leave or engaging in caregiving responsibilities. Addressing these barriers requires a shift in societal attitudes and comprehensive workplace policies to support the solid implementation of legal frameworks. Besides, standards for 'good motherhood/parenthood' promoted by Instagram and TikTok users are encouraging mothers (and seldom fathers) to make an extra effort in raising 'successful' children. However, for working parents, and especially for working mothers, high standards both at work and in parenthood and caregiving become more and more difficult to cope with in the long run.

The aging population and the corresponding rise in need for care place an increasing load on caregivers, exacerbating the already disproportionate burden on women. As demographic shifts continue, there is a pressing need for policies and support systems that alleviate this imbalance and promote equitable caregiving responsibilities.

Needs of Men And Women for Equal Share of Care

Despite the progress in countries, many barriers persist, like backlash regarding gender equality, cultural norms that equate masculinity with breadwinning and distance from emotional labor, workplace stigma for men who seek flexible arrangements, lack of early exposure to caregiving roles in education and upbringing.

In Greece the needs are in better access to care facilities. Municipal centres often operate part-time hours, and private childcare remains costly. Coverage for children under 3 is especially limited. Most eldercare is provided informally by women. Public facilities are scarce, expensive, or low quality. The burden is even higher for women in multigenerational households. The new national strategy remains largely aspirational. Families continue to depend on migrant domestic workers—often unregistered and underpaid – who receive little state protection. Women supervise this informal workforce, bearing an invisible emotional and managerial burden.

Realistic proposals addressing these entrenched inequalities require structural and policy change. A recent survey by the Cyprus HR association (2024) has mapped the needs of employees to balance work-life. These include:

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Parental Leave and Childcare Support:

- Paid parental leave to parents of children up to the age of 12 years old.
- Extension of hours of school or supervised care until 17:30.
- State-paid child facilities.
- Extension of maternity leave.
- Mandatory minimum paternity leave.

Employee well-being and awareness:

- The promotion of self-care among employees, encouraging them to make use of sick leave and wellness programs.
- Education and awareness campaigns on work-life balance and its consequences if absent.

Flexible work arrangements:

- Remote work options.
- The obligation of an employer to inform employees about relevant labor laws.
- Flexible working hours and reduced work schedules might also help in this case.

A multifaceted approach combining workplace policy reform, national policies, and cultural change is needed to close the gender care gap in Cyprus. To challenge gender stereotypes and encourage the equal distribution of caregiving duties, public awareness campaigns and initiatives can be effective. Workplace regulations that facilitate flexibility, promote a more equal distribution of care responsibilities, and offer support to working caregivers are equally crucial. The cycle of gender inequality, which disproportionately impacts mental health and career prospects of women will continue in the absence of such interventions.

In Lithuania, municipal care services remain insufficient to meet growing demands. A shortage of available placements, high service costs, and restricted access contribute to significant challenges for families and individuals, again, mainly women, in need. Enhancing the quality, affordability, and accessibility of public care facilities and services is essential to address these gaps and ensure comprehensive support for those requiring care (Purvaneckiene G. et al., 2024).

In conclusion one should underline that moving forward requires a coordinated and intersectional response. National care strategies must be comprehensive, adequately funded, and gender-sensitive. This includes expanding accessible, affordable public childcare and eldercare services; recognizing and compensating informal care work; and ensuring that workplace policies – such as flexible schedules and parental leave – are truly gender-neutral in both access and uptake.

CHAPTER 7 - CONCLUSION

This research highlights the multifaceted nature of caregiving inequalities and the structural, cultural, and economic barriers impeding equitable care sharing. While legislation and policies offer a solid foundation, transformative change requires a combination of legal reform, supportive workplace practices, public awareness, and role modelling at all levels of society.

Equally important is a shift in societal attitudes. Education systems, media narratives, and public campaigns must all play a role in dismantling gender stereotypes that associate care with weakness or femininity. Men must be both encouraged and enabled to participate equally in caregiving, not just through individual motivation but through structural support and cultural acceptance. Without such systemic transformations, the burden of care will continue to disproportionately limit women's opportunities and well-being while compromising the broader goal of inclusive, resilient societies. But with the right policy tools, employer engagement, and cultural commitment, equal sharing of care can become not just a personal value but a societal standard – crucial for navigating the demographic future and fostering gender equality at all levels of life.

The reports from Cyprus, Greece, Lithuania, and Bulgaria highlight the persistent gender care gap and the challenges faced by both women and men in sharing care responsibilities at home. While legislative measures have been implemented to address these issues, enforcement remains weak, and traditional gender roles continue to dominate. Economic factors, social stigma, and lack of workplace support further exacerbate the unequal distribution of care work.

To achieve true gender equality in caregiving responsibilities, a multifaceted approach is needed. This includes stronger enforcement of existing legislation, cultural change to challenge traditional gender roles, and comprehensive workplace policies that support flexible working arrangements and equal sharing of care responsibilities. Public awareness campaigns and initiatives can also be effective in promoting gender equality and encouraging men to take on a more active role in caregiving.

By addressing these challenges and implementing effective policies, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Lithuania, can move towards a more equal distribution of care responsibilities and improve the overall well-being of both women and men.

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