Introduction

Training Programme: Caring and working in balance

Care responsibilities remain challenging for millions of women in Europe, increasing the rates of gender care gap in the labour market. This means that informal caregivers (those who providing unpaid care to family members or relatives in need), the majority of whom are women, often have to take career breaks, choose part-time employment, or exit the workforce, which contributes to gender disparities and shortages in both labour and skills. The likelihood of leaving the workforce due to caregiving responsibilities lead to wage loss. This wage reduction subsequently results in lower pensions and increased challenges in covering the expenses associated with long term care when these informal caregivers themselves require care.

In recognition of these challenges, the European Union introduced the Work-Life Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158) in 2019, encouraging member states to strengthen support for carers through measures such as carers' leave, flexible working arrangements, and improved workplace practices. Despite these advances, significant disparities remain, particularly in the distribution of unpaid care responsibilities between men and women.

It this context the CareDivide project – "Bridging the gender divide in informal long-term care" (https://caredivide.eu/) was created to confront the structural inequalities embedded in informal caregiving, especially in relation to caring for older family members, which perpetuate gender inequality in the labour market. By focusing on the intersection of caregiving and employment, CareDivide seeks to promote fairer inclusion of caregivers and to challenge the cultural and institutional barriers that hinder gender equality. More specifically the project activities, implemented in Romania, Cyprus, Greece, Spain, and Italy aim to:

1. Enhance understanding on the gender gap in informal long-term care and increase the availability of good practices, tools, and resources for promoting work-life balance.
2. Sensitise and build the capacities of employers, managers, and human resources personnel on how to implement flexible work conditions and practices, fostering the equal inclusion of caregivers in the labour market.
3. Promote the adoption and effective implementation of national and EU legal/policy frameworks towards supporting gender equality in informal long-term care and advocate for policy reforms.
4. Challenge gender stereotypes and traditional perceptions, in the society and in the media, that perpetuate the gender care gap.

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5. Raise public awareness on the existence of the gender care gap, the obstacles and difficulties faced by carers, and the impact of caregiving responsibilities on gender equality.

This will be achieved through the following main activities:

- Mapping the existing situation in informal long-term care and collection of resources, good practices, and tools for promoting work-life balance.
- Capacity building and sensitization programme for 500 employers, managers, human resources personnel, and HR specialists.
- Advocacy campaigns, development of policy recommendations, and organisation of multi-stakeholder roundtables for 75 policy and decision makers.
- Info sessions for 100 mainstream and online media professionals on avoiding gender stereotyping and promoting diverse media representation.
- Dissemination and awareness raising campaigns and events.

As part of this project, the present training programme has been developed to build the capacity of employers, managers, and human resources professionals. It provides guidance on how to design and implement flexible work conditions and practices that respond to the realities of caregiving. By equipping organisations with practical tools and evidence-based strategies, the programme aims to foster workplaces that are inclusive, equitable, and supportive of employees with caregiving responsibilities.

Beyond its immediate application, the training programme serves as a broader resource for advancing gender equality and strengthening resilience in the labour market. It offers insights into the impact of informal caregiving on employment, health, and financial stability, while also highlighting pathways for organisations to adapt policies and practices. In doing so, it provides a resource to gradual progress in addressing the gender divide in long-term care and promoting workplace practices that are inclusive and responsive to caregiving realities.

Target Groups

This training and sensitization programme is specifically designed for employers, managers, and human resources personnel, equipping them with the knowledge, tools, and strategies needed to foster inclusive workplace practices that support employees with caregiving responsibilities. By focusing on those directly responsible for workplace policies and staff management, the programme aims to generate meaningful change at the organisational level.

At the same time, the programme adopts a cross-sectoral approach, engaging a wider range of stakeholders across both the private and public sectors to ensure impact at multiple levels:

- ***Primary target group:*** employers, managers, HR personnel, and HR specialists, who play a central role in shaping workplace culture and implementing flexible work arrangements.
- ***Secondary target group:*** policymakers in public authorities working on gender equality, employment, and formal long-term care; NGOs/CSOs and social partners active in the fields of women's rights, employment, and services for older adults; and other actors committed to advancing gender equality and supporting carers.

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Care Divide
Bridging the gender divide in informal long-term care

Training Modules

This training programme consists of three modules that, together, provide a comprehensive exploration of informal caregiving and its impact on employment, gender equality, and workplace practices. Each module builds on the previous one, offering a progressive learning journey that shifts from recognition to policy frameworks to awareness and cultural change.

- ***Module 1 – Recognising and Supporting Informal Carers:*** The first module sets the foundation by clarifying the distinction between formal and informal care within European long-term care systems. It highlights the growing reliance on informal (unpaid carers), shaped by demographic trends such as ageing populations and increased care needs. The module explores the profound effects of caregiving on employment, health, emotional wellbeing, and financial stability, while also presenting ways in which labour market can respond. Attention is given to workplace measures such as flexible arrangements, leave policies, and recognition practices, alongside strategies that empower carers through training and skill development.
- ***Module 2 – Work–Life Balance: National Framework and Workplace Adaptation:*** The second module places caregiving within the broader policy landscape. It introduces the EU Work–Life Balance Directive and examines how its provisions have been implemented across partner countries, including Greece, Spain, Italy, Cyprus, and Romania. By comparing national approaches, the module highlights both strengths and limitations in reconciling work and care responsibilities. It also showcases examples of good practices at national and corporate levels, illustrating how policy frameworks can be translated into workplace strategies that promote flexibility, inclusion, and support for employees with caregiving responsibilities.
- ***Module 3 – Raising Awareness on Gender Divide in Caregiving and its Effects on Work–Life Balance:*** The final module turns to the cultural and institutional dimensions of caregiving. It examines how expectations around care are shaped by social norms and psychological factors, and how these contribute to persistent gender disparities in both formal and informal care. The module highlights the consequences of this divide for women's employment, career progression, and financial security. It also introduces practical tools for change, including the development of soft skills such as empathy, communication, and resilience, as well as digital solutions that enable flexible work and improve productivity. By combining awareness with practical strategies, this module encourages employers, policymakers, NGOs, and social

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partners to foster workplace cultures that are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the realities of caregiving.

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