



We champion the wider family who care for children

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UK lagging behind other countries in recognising crucial role of grandparents

'Granny leave', transferable parental leave and paid care: some of our European neighbours lead the way for growing numbers of grandparent carers, says new report

Britain's grandparents are undervalued and overlooked compared to those in a number of other European countries, according to *Grandparenting in Europe*, a groundbreaking new study by charity Grandparents Plus, the Beth Johnson Foundation and the Institute of Gerontology at Kings College London.

Funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, *Grandparenting in Europe* shows that with an increasingly ageing population, high numbers of mothers in employment and the prevalence of family breakdown, the contribution of grandparents is becoming increasingly important in family life - in the UK and across Europe. The study reveals:

- **6 out of 10** grandmothers and 5 out of 10 grandfathers across the EU provide childcare for their grandchildren
- **40% of grandparents** in Italy, Spain and Greece provide regular childcare
- **20% of grandparents** in Sweden, France and Denmark provide regular childcare

But the UK is lagging behind some of its European neighbours when it comes to recognising the role of grandparents – leaving many struggling to juggle work and care and without financial support. The study shows that a number of EU countries have already taken steps to ensure grandparents' role is supported including:

- Parents able to **transfer parental leave** to a grandparent
- Working grandparents able to **take leave** if their grandchild is unwell

- Grandparents being **paid for the care** they provide under certain circumstances (eg to support teenage parents)

In the UK, parental leave **cannot** be transferred to grandparents, nor is it possible for parents to pay grandparents childcare tax credits or childcare vouchers if they care for children so that parents can work. Grandparents also have no right to request flexible working. 1 in 3 working mothers in the UK rely on grandparents for childcare. Previous research published by Grandparents Plus shows that working age women on low incomes provide significant amounts of grandparental childcare.

However, the announcement that from April 2011 grandparents in the UK will be able to claim National Insurance credits is a significant step forward in the recognition of the caring contribution that grandparents make. Campaigners argue it's time to build on this by learning from some of the more progressive policies in Europe.

Alongside *Grandparenting in Europe*, the charity is today releasing an online poll by YouGov of grandparents which shows:

- There is overwhelming support from grandparents for the proposal that they should be paid for significant periods of childcare with 7 out of 10 (70%) saying they thought grandparents should be paid through tax credits or childcare vouchers, rising to 3 out of 4 (75%) for grandparents working full time.
- Nearly half (46%) of all grandparents who provide childcare for their grandchildren say they would work flexibly if it was an option, while almost a third (32%) say this is already an option for them.
- More than half (53%) of Grandparents between the age of 45 and 54 agree that grandparents should be entitled to a period of leave in their own right when a grandchild is born.

Grandparenting in Europe will be launched at Grandparents Plus' Michael Young Family and Kinship Memorial Lecture this evening which is being delivered by historian David Kynaston, author of *Family Britain*.

Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus said:

"It's taken a long time for grandparents in the UK to begin to be recognised for the caring role that they so often play. National Insurance credits from April next year will certainly help to protect their pension entitlement but this won't help them now. We have to match it with steps towards transferable parental leave and flexible working if we really want to make it easier for them to combine work and care."

"This study reveals that a number of our European neighbours are both recognizing the role that grandparents are playing and giving families control over their lives,

supporting the decisions that they make. We need to do that for families in the UK too.”

“During the election campaign David Cameron said he wants to make the UK the most family friendly society in the world. It is good to see the Government already taking steps to do this with the promise of a consultation on extending the right to request flexible working to all. Half of working age grandparents who provide childcare said they would work flexibly if it was an option.”

“It is often said that grandparents do it for love not money, and that’s true. But our survey shows an overwhelming majority in favour of being paid for childcare. Perhaps granny has had enough?”

Speaking in support of the report Alan Hattan Yeo, Chief Executive of the Beth Johnson Foundation said:

“We have to start prioritizing the contribution that grandparents make to family life, to the economy and to the community. Our ageing population makes this issue all the more pressing.”

Andrew Barnett, UK Director of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation which has funded the new EU study added:

“The evidence highlighted in this report shows that across the UK and Europe grandparents provide valuable continuity of care for families, particularly during difficult and chaotic situations. We must ensure that policies and practices support grandparents to fulfill this important role without it having a negative impact on their lives.”

Ends.

Notes to editors

For a full copy or executive summary of the *Grandparenting in Europe*, and a summary of the YouGov polling data, or to speak to Sam Smethers at Grandparents Plus or one of the report authors, please contact:

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We will also be making a number of **case studies** available.

1. Specific policies relating to Grandparents from across Europe:

- **Germany**

Parents can take leave up to three years after a child's birth and 12 months can be transferred until the child is 8. Leave can be transferred to a grandparent if the parent is seriously ill or disabled, or if the parent dies. A grandparent can also take the leave if the parent is a teenager or still in full-time education and the parent does not take the leave themselves.

Grandparents who are the primary carer for their grandchild are also entitled to take the leave. Working grandparents are also entitled to take up to ten days paid leave to look after a grandchild in an emergency, or to take unpaid leave of up to six months.

- **Hungary – parental leave and parental allowance**

In Hungary parental allowances and parental leave can be transferred to a grandparent if the parents agree and if the child is looked after in the grandparent's home.

- **Portugal – support for grandparents where parents are teenagers**

In Portugal grandparents are entitled to a financial allowance if the mother is aged 16 or younger and the grandparents live together with their grandchild.

Grandparents are also entitled to take up to 30 days a year and receive a financial allowance to care for sick child, if parents are unable to look after the child because of work commitments or if they have already used up their parental leave entitlement.

- **Denmark**

In Denmark all public sector and most private sector employers permit a parent to stay at home for the first day of a child's illness, and in practice the grandmother often stays at home the second day.

2. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is an international charitable foundation with cultural, educational and social interests. Based in Lisbon with branches in London and Paris, the Foundation is in a privileged position to support transnational work tackling contemporary issues facing Europe. The purpose of the UK Branch in London is to connect and enrich the experiences of individuals, families and communities with a special interest in supporting those who are the most disadvantaged. In 2008, the Foundation launched an initiative on ageing and social cohesion, with a number of activities developed with colleagues in Lisbon. This report represents the latest development of a wide portfolio of work which we hope will contribute to a growing understanding of the impact of demographic ageing to our society.

3. Grandparents Plus is the national charity which champions the vital role of grandparents and the wider family in children's lives - especially when they take on the caring role in difficult family circumstances. We work to support grandparents and the wider family by:

- **Campaigning for change** so that their contribution to children's wellbeing and care is valued and understood
- **Providing evidence, policy solutions and training** so that they get the services and support they need to help children thrive
- **Building alliances and networks** so that they can have a voice and support each other, especially when they become children's full-time carers.

4. YouGov polling

Fieldwork for YouGov Poll was undertaken between 5th - 8th February 2010. Total sample size was 4361 adults of which 1103 were grandparents. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). Because the YouGov survey used an online poll and internet penetration among those aged 70 or over is lower, the sample is skewed towards younger grandparents. This means for example that the number of grandparents in the survey who are still working is higher than for all grandparents in the population.

Other information

5. Full-time carers

There are 200,000 grandparents and other family members raising children who can no longer live with their parents. In the UK, 3 out of 4 of these carers experience financial hardship – with 1 in 3 living on less than £200 a week. It is estimated that the Government saves more than £12 billion a year for the 300,000 children who live with their grandparents or other family members rather than being in foster care. In a landmark legal case a grandparent carer won the right to be paid by Kent County Council at the same rate as a foster carer. Grandparents Plus campaigns on behalf of grandparent carers. You can read more about this case at

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/kent/8673363.stm>

And for Grandparents Plus comment on this case go to

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/may/16/grandparent-carer-allowance>

6. Other research published by Grandparents Plus:

Protect Support Provide, Examining the role of grandparents in families at risk of poverty, University of Oxford. Funded by EHRC, March 2010

http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/publications_files/Protect%20Support%20Provide%20Report.pdf

Recognition, Respect, Reward, Survey Findings Report, October 2009

http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/publications_files/Recognition%20Respect%20Reward%20Survey%20Findings.pdf

The Poor Relation? Grandparental care: where older people's poverty and child poverty meet, University of Oxford. Funded by EHRC, Interim Report, June 2009

<http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/files/The%20Poor%20Relation%20Interim%20Report.pdf>

My second mum and dad, The involvement of grandparents in the lives of teenage grandchildren, University of Oxford, July 2009

http://www.grandparentsplus.org.uk/publications_files/%E2%80%9CMy%20Second%20Mum%20and%20Dad%E2%80%9D%20research%20report.pdf