



We champion the wider
family who care for children

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PRESS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
**Europe’s ‘granny leave’ means Britain has a long way
to go in ‘family friendly’ stakes, says Grandparents Plus**

**As charity launches groundbreaking research study on
grandparents in Europe**

Britain has a long way to go in recognising and supporting the role of grandparent carers, according to campaigning charity Grandparents Plus who today issue a challenge to the Coalition Government to deliver on its promise of making Britain the most family friendly country in the world.

The challenge comes on the day the Government’s *Family Friendly Britain* consultation launches, which includes the proposal to extend the right to request flexible working to all employees. However, campaigners are concerned that the Government is also proposing to weaken the right to request by replacing the statutory process for considering flexible working requests with a Code of Practice. Currently only parents and carers have the right to request flexible working. Older workers, including grandparents, miss out on the entitlement.

The Government has also stopped short of proposing that parents should be able to transfer parental leave to grandparents, something the charity has called for and has found is available to families in other parts of Europe.

Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus, said:

“At a time when families in Britain are under growing pressure they are more likely to turn to grandparents for help with childcare. But many of these grandparents are working age themselves. This consultation is important because access to flexible working would really help them to juggle work and care.

“1 in 3 working mums rely on grandparents for childcare. We can’t claim to be a truly family friendly country while grandparents continue to get such a raw deal. Our research shows that in some parts of Europe grandparents get better recognition for

their role in supporting families. Our government's failure to do the same is a sign of how out of touch they are with the reality of family life in Britain today. ”

Grandparents Plus has recently secured significant new funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation to launch a major study focusing on grandparenting in Europe. The groundbreaking piece of work, in partnership with the Beth Johnson Foundation and the Institute of Gerontology at King's College London, will highlight the differences between countries across Europe in recognising the role of grandparent carers.

It will build on research from the charity's scoping survey from June 2010 *Grandparenting in Europe*, which showed that:

- **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**

The study highlights how far behind the UK falls in valuing grandparents, compared to other European nations, showing that a number of EU countries have already taken steps to ensure the grandparents' role is supported, including:

- **Parents able to transfer parental leave to a grandparent (Hungary, Germany)**
- **Working grandparents able to take leave if their grandchild is unwell or where the parent is still in full-time education (in Germany)**
- **Grandparents being paid for the care they provide under certain circumstances (e.g. to support teenage parents in Portugal)**

The charity wants to see:

- the **right to request flexible working extended to all** which will particularly help the growing army of grandparents who are juggling work and childcare so that parents can work.
- **parental leave to be transferable to grandparents**
- the introduction of a two week period of '**granny leave**'
- **grandparents to be paid either through tax credits or childcare vouchers** for the childcare they provide.
- those **grandparents who are raising their grandchildren** and other family carers who step in to raise a child in the absence of parents to be entitled to **paid leave when they take on the care of a child**, similar to adoption leave.

The new study will establish a detailed picture of family policy and grandparenting in each of the 10 EU countries featured. It will also, for the first time, identify comparative data sources to build up a comprehensive picture of grandparenting across the EU.

Sam Smethers, Chief Executive of Grandparents Plus continued:

“We know some of our European neighbours are already well ahead in recognising and supporting grandparents – and this new study will allow us to find out exactly how their systems work and what we can learn for the UK.”

Andrew Barnett, UK Director of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation said:

“We are funding this new research because the evidence tells us that grandparents are playing a significant role in family life. As our population ages that trend is set to continue. How we recognise, value and support that role should be of strategic importance to governments across the EU.”

Karen Glaser, Institute of Gerontology, Kings College London added:

“We are very excited to be undertaking this new study in partnership with the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Grandparents Plus, and the Beth Johnson Foundation. Our earlier scoping study found that despite its growing importance as a matter of policy, there is little research examining what grandparenting looks like across Europe, or how policies in different European countries influence the structure of grandparenthood.

“We are looking forward to developing a better understanding of what types of family policies help to support the family including the extended family, and in what circumstances. “

Ends.

For more information and interviews with Sam Smethers at Grandparents Plus, please contact: Melissa Milner melissa@dhacommunications.co.uk 020 7793 4035 / 07976 636 228

Notes to editors:

Background

Changes in family life have led to the role of grandparents becoming more important; with people living longer and more mothers working outside of the home, grandparents are often heavily relied on to provide childcare. This contributes to cost savings for many families, particularly where there are low incomes or single

parent households. But these trends are not only identifiable in the UK. Many developed countries are facing the same experiences.

However, the benefit and support these grandparent carers provide is not adequately being recognised in the UK.

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. They do this 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
- **Advising and supporting** grandparents and wider family members by ensuring they have access to professional advice and information, can have a voice and help each other, especially when they become children's full-time carers. The charity runs a Network for grandparents and other carers who are raising children who no longer live with their parents and have recently launched a new advice service.

Advice and information service 0300 123 7015 10am-3pm, Mon-Fri

advice@grandparentsplus.org.uk

Copies of the charity's scoping study, Grandparenting in Europe, can be downloaded from their website www.grandparentsplus.org.uk

The Institute of Gerontology, Kings College London

The Institute of Gerontology is one of the leading centres worldwide dedicated to the study of ageing and later life. Founded in 1986, it is at the vanguard of multi-disciplinary research, acting as a bridge between the social, clinical and biological sciences. The Institute has many long-standing research and teaching collaborations including the Institute of Psychiatry, the School of Medicine, the School of Nursing and Midwifery and the School of Biomedical & Health Sciences.

The Institute's inter-disciplinary nature is reflected in its broad research sponsorship base; it has received funding from several UK Research Councils (i.e. ESRC, MRC, EPSRC & AHRB). The Institute's recent research has included the study of: elder abuse; pensions and poverty; housing and technology; the health and social concerns of 'new' ageing populations; end of life care and bereavement; the demography of informal care; falls prevention among older people; and the biology of natural ageing. Current research is focused on three core areas: (i) ageing policy, health and healthcare; (ii) ageing policy & family life; and (iii) global ageing.