Unpaid informal caregivers provide most long-term care delivered in Europe, equivalent to 3.6% of gross domestic product.1

Costs of caregiving are rising


Gender matters

Most unpaid informal carers are women. The gender imbalance is greatest at ages 50–64 years, when caregiving prevalence is highest.2

Women are overrepresented among unpaid informal caregivers, as is the case in the formal health and long-term-care workforce.

Gender differences in health concerns

Unpaid informal caregiving, especially over time and at higher intensity, can have detrimental effects on carers’ health and well-being.

Gender discrimination can interact with other forms of prejudice to worsen the health effects of informal caregiving and disadvantage unpaid informal caregivers from seeking and receiving help and support.

Male caregivers mostly provide care for spouses and carry out household management tasks.

Female caregivers deliver more personal care, and frequent and high-intensity care.

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately affected unpaid informal caregivers’ health, especially in women, and the gender gap in providing care widened.4,5

How can unpaid informal carers’ well-being be improved?

Recognise, and reduce. Redistribute and reward unpaid informal care.

Count carers and understand their needs
Provide respite care
Provide training
Offer counselling
Provide information about available services
Ensure case management and service coordination
Provide regular health check-ups
Provide financial support

Gender unequal
Perpetuates inequalities

Gender blind
Ignores gender norms

Gender sensitive
Acknowledges but does not address inequalities

Gender specific
Considers women’s and men’s specific needs

Gender transformative
Aims at transforming harmful gender norms, roles and relations

Countries will benefit from moving beyond gender-sensitive and gender-specific interventions to gender-transformative policies.

Source: WHO GRASS tool (Gender mainstreaming for health managers: a practical approach, WHO, 2011)

We acknowledge the technical review and collaboration provided by the European Association Working for Carers, or Eurocarers.

©World Health Organization 2022. Some rights reserved. This work is available under the CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo).